APPARITION
*
F. LE GROS CLARK

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# APPARITION

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*by*

F. Le Gros Clark

*"An Apparition of a bloody child rises"*
Macbeth: Act iv.

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PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
THE EDINBURGH PRESS, 9 AND 11 YOUNG STREET, EDINBURGH

# NOTE

*This novel treats of modern controversy; but no one will, I trust, infer that it therefore propagates a theory or portrays real men and women. The characters and ideas of a novelist can be no more than facets of his own mind.*

*When I search my generation, I discover controversy and change. One cannot evade them; one can only try to present them with sympathy and understanding. Desiring a formula, that shall embody in some part the soul of this generation, I have lighted on the stage direction from* Macbeth, *quoted on the title-page.*

*I have no fondness for dedications; but I am moved, by feelings that her friends will readily appreciate, to dedicate this novel to my wife.*

## CHAPTER ONE

On a Saturday in the middle of September '25, the Brabant family was gathered together—at old Arthur Brabant's house in West Surrey. This house he had leased, when he retired from business, shortly before the War ended. Eight was their dinner-hour—in the long low-ceilinged room, that had walls of a polished and grave gamboge and a deeply moulded cornice. The dark furniture dropped into obscure shadows—the carpet was of so dark a weave, that one felt sustained there above a great cauldron ; and so mild were the amber-folded electric lights, that there rose the semblance of a branching exhalation about the dark frames of their pictures and the sway of their green-brown curtains. Copper shone impending, vast silent urns and tureens upon the sideboard—a clock—a Bavarian wall-mirror ; and, as if from undulating tree-branches, a faint air crept always through the window, seeming visible as is smoke against the low plaster of the ceiling.

They eyed one another warily awhile. Pool stirred to a few rapid lisps, an occasional cough ; and old Arthur Brabant, when he remarked next him his daughter-in-law, Evelyn, raised his brows and murmured to her, " The swallows are gathering now. Yes—I spied the little beggars this afternoon from the stable-yard. Have you seen them ? " He grinned. " Have you ? Eh ? "

She only inclined her head to listen ; he expected no more and said no more.

There were only two children and both of them were now married. Irene's husband was Maurice Shipley, who had a part-practice in Earl's Court ; he sat next her—and seriously he pouted round during that silence. His forehead gleamed. Hugh caught an amber reflection across his pince-nez and knew, as one always knows, that Maurice was trusting—how deeply did he trust—there would be no disharmony at this meal. Tea-time had been a nightmare to him.

Down came the first soup-plate, and at once out steamed the conversation ; actually they talked, pattering with words

the white pool of their table-cloth, silver and glass, yellow chrysanthemums; they said "Did you go out? . . . Really? You did then?"—and their soup-plates came down —and behind them flowed on the everlasting tide of service; and only Mrs Brabant watched it. She sat there in dull amethyst; her curly hair was cropped and slightly grey. She alone cared for that stealthy tide of service, turning her very soul into a spoon and manipulating the tide from corner to corner. She was dumb; cheerfulness sprang fretfully from the rest, as though cheerfulness might in time take on substance and dwell amongst them, self-motived and pervasive. With laughter they took their soup-spoons. There was Irene in silver-grey—Evelyn in black, dark-skinned herself with short dark hair, turning her eyes coldly from side to side. Hugh gazed at his sister and gazed at his wife; and then peeped at his mother with privy interest; and discovered last of all upon his right Miss Dallas in her deep blue—Miss Dallas, his mother's second-cousin, who had slowly rooted in their household—that axiomatic woman, that exuberant sea of a woman.

"And so you, my dear Maurice," said she, "have not even *heard* of Mrs Falstinger, and how can you then dissect the validity of her cures? How, indeed? T't—dear—I should have imagined . . ."

"Ah, but they fly," murmured Mr Brabant, "as regular as the clock—regular as the clock. One day our own affairs may be arranged as tidily; don't you think so?" To Evelyn he bowed his head. "Eh? Don't you think so?" He was tall and bony with thick whitened hair, and the skeletal structure of his face thrust prominent in forehead and cheeks and lower jaw. "Do you *hope* so?" he said, intimately grinning.

"Me?" she answered. "Perhaps—if it's a real swallow's life we're to have, when we're regularized." It was a spread and faintly careless accent that she had; it was a country accent.

"Ah, yes," said he, and sighing, took his spoon in long fingers. "Have you seen my new little glass-house yet? Round by the potting-sheds? With the tree-frogs in it? Eh?"

"No, I haven't. I haven't had the time." Her eyes wandered. "What . . . colour are they?"

"Colour?" said he. "A good green colour, like leaves—

a fine *juicy* colour. Ah, they're restful little chaps ; you can see 'em all day squatting on the plants, all day long."

There was Hugh, with long features and heavy eyelids and stiff brown hair brushed from his forehead ; he was two years younger than Irene. One should, thought his anxious mother, say a word to Hugh—draw him into the conversation ; yet Irene would chatter on to her about this or that—pots, pans, walking-shoes, cut flowers, the grandson, studio portraits. Two had already finished their soup. Maurice was gliding from Miss Dallas towards tree-frogs ; chatter came like tiny nut-crackers—the clink of spoons on plates. Hugh was silent. Hugh, indeed—his mother's attention slid ineffectually from him—was more sensitive than the rest to low gamboge-tinted room, that web of a family ; more perversely and coldly sensitive, that was what he was.

His mother stretched a naked arm and set it near him upon the table-cloth. It was unconscious ; still she drank in Irene's chatter. It was equipoise she yearned for—unbroken surfaces ; why should surfaces ever be broken ? Not a quarter of their frets and arguments did she comprehend. He looked at her naked arm curiously—fondly and with absorption ; soft air, like the curling of pollen-smoke, rustled the green-brown curtains behind him.

" But ah, Hugh dear," said his mother, released at length, " Hugh, you don't find a draught from that window behind you ; I thought it *so* mild "—and he, aroused suddenly, had twisted round in his chair and answered, " No, no. But you, dear ? No ? And what about Irene ? "

" Oh, I'm comfortable, thanks," cried she.

" H'm ! "—and he'd seen a newspaper on the dark window-table. " Hullo, is that this evening's ? I was wondering who'd hidden it." He tipped over his chair and caught at it—hung reading the head-lines. " You don't mind ? " he asked of his mother.

That was provocation ; he knew it—it stirred in him like a worm ; it stirred in the rest like half a dozen worms. He could have drawn back but he wouldn't ; he'd seen Maurice blinking. Hidden it ? Who would have hidden it ? Who hides newspapers ? He read the head-lines ; he'd remarked Irene's eyes.

He glanced at his sister. He brooded. " Er . . . who left the paper in here ? "

She was waxen. " I believe I dropped it there, if you really want to know."

" Oh ? Indeed ? Have you taken to reading the papers then ? "

" No, my dear. No."

" Anything fresh in this to-night ? " he said, tossing it back.

" I didn't glance at it."

" You didn't ? "—and he stared at her. " Then why on earth . . . ? " His lips moved.

Mr Brabant from his windless outer spaces said then, " Is that this evening's paper ? I was looking for it "—and everyone knew he shouldn't have spoken and he himself knew it ; he bent his head and looked up from under his eyebrows. A spoon rattled on its plate.

" There," said his son quickly. " There you are, you see. People wanted the paper to read ; not to drop about "—and his sister replied, " Hugh, don't be an infant."

Mrs Brabant helplessly said, " No, Hugh means, dear, that he doesn't often get a chance of chatting over events with us. Not so often as before."

" Hoo ! I like that ! " cried Irene. " You know the way he *chats* about events. I like that. Lucky for you if he doesn't. He's such a pleasant optimist. Remember the War and the kind of . . ."

Her mother thrust a hand feebly across. The current of service went on. Maurice swallowed ; and Miss Dallas surging forward commented, " Rather it's lucky, I think, my dear Irene, that we can all find our several uses for a newspaper."

" Oh ? What do you mean by that, Aunt Mildred ? "

" Shocked expression, my dear child. H'h. Nothing gross, I really assure you. H'h. Only that some minds wish to peruse a paper and others prefer it . . . withdrawn from perusal."

" You're smart."

" No, no. No."

They asked into Mr Brabant's ear whether he would have wine or whisky.

Mr Brabant said, " Eh ? Yes, whisky, please. Whisky."

Hugh became sourly conversational. " This is all very strange. Here I come down from London imagining it to

be rather the hub of . . . What ? Oh, yes, whisky, please. Whisky. Thanks. I wish one of you would draw up a list of disinfected topics."

Silence met him. He was offered fish. " Have *you*," said Irene towards her mother, " seen any of those new saucepans they're selling at Harrods ? "

" It was to Mother," said he, " that I was talking."

" Oh ? "

" Whom do you imagine I was talking to ? . . . Oh, well, I don't know."

He drank—and Evelyn weary with Mr Brabant's gentle smiles, commented aloud, " What does it matter, Hugh ? I don't want newspapers down here either, the air makes me lazy."

He flushed at her. Mrs Brabant, accepting the chance coldly, dropped her eyelids upon her daughter-in-law and murmured, " You always like to keep abreast of things, don't you, Hugh ? "—and he flushed still more, and groped at the family fish-knives ; he salted bitterly.

His mind stirred unsavoury, erecting the mean arch through which he always pondered ; and in silence he dissected this weak and baffled family. Family of thin seclusions. Family bourgeois. Family that clings to all its members, chafing and wearing them eternally away. He pitied. He had discovered so much and they so little. Half a minute all this took ; and chatter was creeping out again. Then he listened.

To Mr Brabant Eve was saying, " Swallows ? Yes, I used to love 'em."

The old man bowed towards her. " If you went out on to the lawn here at the right season, you'd hear them flying over. I believe you would."

" Would one really ? "

" Yes. I like them too."

Irene was at her mother's ear, telling her about little Paul, who was in Earl's Court with his nurse ; and their voices lowered and more and more was expressed by a glance, a question upon the lips, brief silences and heads that almost met. Other voices flowed in. " Under the eaves," they said. To speak again of swallows—" Especially they like the stable roof "—and " South ? " brooded Evelyn. " Is it south they fly from here ? "

Mr Brabant said, " Yes, I suppose they must,"—and lifted

his eyes to the low ceiling, where they travelled gently. " South or south-east, I think, wouldn't it be ? Let's see. Seems to me they must go south-east and follow the coast of France down. And then do they cross the Pyrenees ? And along the Mediterranean coast of Spain ? Yes." He surveyed a moment the set and unperplexing rhythm of lower life and dropped his chin in a series of tiny jerks. " Yes. Yes." He turned puzzled eyes on her.

Maurice had a deep voice ; languid waves broke along his palate. He said, " Talking of swallows, that's a devilishly queer superstition about them going into horse-ponds. Don't you think so, sir ? " He blinked.

" There's no basis to it," said Mr Brabant.

" Oh, I never thought there was, sir."

" There's no basis to the notion at all, you know," repeated Mr Brabant gravely ; and after a lost silence he bent to them and said, " In the country, it's natural a fellow should take more interest in beasts and so on. Do you think so ? Have you . . . h'm . . . have you ever seen a kinkajou ? "

Morosely behind his archway Hugh watched the vegetables round ; he absorbed each dissectible finger and glance. Family bourgeois. Family sustained by this meek tide of service like flower-heads upon a bowl. His mother touched the spoon, looked once at her maid's face and back ; there was history behind that look. He saw Miss Dallas selective as a matter of duty ; he heard his father's " Thank you. Thank you." He brooded ; the dishes were at his own elbow and quickened breath stirred his hair ; tense and waiting those hands. What thoughts beyond them ? What fears—what condemnations ? Faintly they quivered. He took his potatoes and his beans, saying sweetly to his mother, " These are good. You grew them in the garden ? "

She answered, " Yes, my dear "—and he was comforted. He drew fresh health from whisky, and noticed with appreciation that glisten of tiny hairs upon his mother's soft naked arm along the cloth.

Then suddenly she had bent, murmuring, " My dear, I have set your . . . wife next your father. M'm ? How *well* they get on together."

He, too, was bending ; his eyes were drawn to hers. " How well," she said, and hesitated, laughed like a feeble croak. " You have noticed it surely. I was trying to recall ; I fancy

it is he with whom she feels most at home. Creatures," she intimated smoothly. " Birds . . . m'm ? And vegetables. You must *trust* your mother. . . ."

Her heavy-lidded eyes compelled him ; slowly he flushed. Like a silver-grey cat watched his sister ; and, " Oh," replied his lips, " you are thoughtful, dear ; yes, I know—but Eve has no need of such consideration."

" M'm ? "

" I have said so before ; what I mean is . . ."

She was not listening to him. She asked, " Are the insurances going nicely, dear ? "—and Miss Dallas breathed abundantly, " Indeed, yes, what is the state of the insurance world ? "

" Rotten," he replied venomously. " The depression is worse than ever, if anything "—and he drank ; and in the uncertain silence Mr Brabant could be heard, as from a tunnel—" For I never pass one of these State processions and what-not without clapping my hand to my pocket ; for I know it's my money they're after to pay for it. Lifeguards, eh ? Those fellows must be a devil of an expense ; don't you feel the same ? Eh ? "

The course crumbled down richly and gradually like mud ; the forks of all worked through it. They dared now to laugh.

Evelyn turned sly glances down the table ; her face was cold, saying, " Hugh would know."

" What ? "

His father gazed mildly through him. " Yes. Er . . . Hugh would know, of course."

" What ? "

Westminster . . . what ? One couldn't gather. Westminster . . . they'd been laughing, and why then was Eve cold suddenly ? And his father burst like a bubble into a wide wrinkling grin at him. He knew—did he not ?—that joke about Westminster Abbey.

He listened. " Ah, *that* one," said he. " Yes, yes."

They'd imagined he must know it. " And I've never heard it, damme," frothed his easy father.

" You have not ? " said he, warmed to them, flinging an arm sideways over his chair-back. " You have not—eh ? " He told it. It was not a reputable joke ; it slid somewhat grossly upon the rites of Marriage, it involved high personages, both sacred and profane.

It was a success; and "Huh-huh!" went his father. "The martyrs and the virgins. . . . That's good. Huh-huh!" He nodded his bony face up and down. How the old man loved this—the old eccentric behind whose melancholy such bubbles grew and burst; and Irene said, "Rather pointless. Rather masculine."

He didn't care about that, because Maurice was laughing and even Miss Dallas. He flourished the napkin about his lips, and brushed her away. "B'God, my dear girl, am I to keep my mouth closed? You've heard that before?"

"I don't have your opportunities."

"Don't condemn me, my dear girl; condemn those that . . . sent me. Here's Father; did you ask me for it? What? Not listening to us. Did he ask me?" He jerked his shoulders, jerked his head.

"Hoo, yes," she said sourly. "But he laughs not as you laugh. I'm not blind and deaf. I know *you*. You laugh at virginity, because *someone*—you don't care who—might think it a vaguely decent thing; and at religion, because you hope your remark might hurt someone."

"A million regrets. I didn't know you had scruples."

"I haven't."

"Ah, but you have," he drawled and drank.

"I haven't. I won't have you turning it that way," she cried, striking her hand among her silver—and it rang. "You are so venomous. You sneer. . . . It seems we can't meet now but you set yourself to work me up and work me up, and to-day worse than ever. You're a blight. Like an injury to yourself you feel other people's happiness and harmless pleasure. Bitter"—and her mother restrained, but she wouldn't have it. The room for them all sweated cold and thick after hot laughter; they were in pain.

"You," she went on, "you're not healthy. Yes, I did pinch your damned paper, because you're unendurable. You read the paper for your own mean, grinning comments."

"Facts, my dear girl."

"To air your cynicism . . ."

"Facts."

"Facts?" she cried with a movement past control. "Don't I remember that, when I saw you in the War, you chose just those moments when my nerves were strained the worst, to laugh in your way and argue with me . . . *argue*, *argue*,

with me that it didn't matter, and we'd probably be beaten anyhow. Oh, I haven't forgotten, and I dream about it still sometimes. Do you hear that? I dream even now about it. Don't I, Maurice? You tell him I do."

"Mmm—yes, m'dear, I think you do sometimes dream about . . . the War. What?"—and blinking, he said hastily to Evelyn, "she does really, you know, sometimes. Yes."

"Oh . . ."

"You see," cried the woman, twisting her fingers. "You see. And if things are so bad, one would think you might work to set them right. But you? You work? No. You . . . ? It might improve a bit if you did, and you'd hate that. That would spoil everything for you. You couldn't take a commission like every one else did; you've got to go into the ranks and look like a damned sloppy mean . . . For you couldn't dress yourself even as decently as the clothes would let you." Her eyes flowed with exasperation; years lay behind this. She waved her hand. "And you're still the same. You mix naturally with all the meanest and laziest people. . . . Doesn't he, Aunt Mildred? Oh, doesn't he, Maurice? You know. And doesn't he, Evelyn?" She stretched across, beyond all care of distinctions. "Isn't he like that?"

Evelyn, with voice like claws, came in—"Including *me*, hey? I've got to . . . mix with him a little, see? Though I wouldn't spoil it for you, if you want to include me."

"Oh, how can I mean you?"

"Ah, but, but——" sighed Evelyn, and quivered suddenly. "But I was sure you didn't; she couldn't have meant that, Mother, could she?"—and Mrs Brabant, who was staring at her, expressionless, made no answer. She may not have heard.

She made no answer, and all the room swelled with that vacuum but for a moment, no more, since Irene had tipped over her glass and the red stain ran across the table. Air dried and was sick; another wound we cannot bear. Diminishing, diminishing. "Salt it," said Miss Dallas, thickly.

These things are painful but they are not death; and after a due pause their leisured voices began to crawl cautiously along the pool's surface. Miss Dallas spoke and Maurice answered her—Mr Brabant and then his wife; their tones were wistful and kind. Hugh said nothing. Through such a scene how is it one gazes almost dumb with heavy eyelids,—and

then a smile ? Why not act ? *He* couldn't say why not ; only that at these moments his consciousness fluttered suddenly on air. Air was its last friend. Soft tides of air from the window touched his neck. He lost grip. He felt himself too deeply rooted in this family, ever to express among it one half his thoughts and his beliefs. He sneered and was afraid. He grew hot ; a pulse beat like hammers on his throat ; and so, in short, he smiled.

One could achieve no more. Tide of the world was rising ; let it rise and wash them all away. Let it come like multitudinous feet and flow across these gardens, this house, this food. The red tide was rising. They handed him savoury upon a plate.

He glanced round and met his father's dog-brown eyes, staring at him with a strange bewilderment ; and yet the features behind them were sad and contemplative. The eyes stared on, even though he met them. They might have grown stalks of their own, speculations of their own, out of the placid skull. His father saw and did not see him. His eyes questioned, obeying some new itch that lay far below that pond of consciousness ; and Hugh was suddenly afraid. They brought him coffee. One took and handed cigarettes—cigars. Mr Brabant was talking about vegetable marrows and dew in September.

So it ended. Amber-shaded lights could be left like the drinking of a soporific ; and they were thankfully free to granulate themselves into the chambers and corridors of the house, whispering and nodding together. Life eased itself down to mere comment—or so they felt. In the drawing-room Irene wound the gramophone. At last Hugh could touch his own wife on her arm and say, " Suppose *we* went into the garden for a while ; it's not chilly, not at all."

" M'm ? "

" You heard me, didn't you ? The garden I said, dear . . ."

" I heard you. I was only thinking of it. Oh . . . yes, if you like. Would you fetch me a shawl down ? "

" Yes, yes," said he.

" The green one it is."

" Yes."

Mounting the stairs even earlier towards his study, Mr Brabant's skin was aware of so many whisperings and corners and the chant of his gramophone ; he feinted between them

all. Somewhere he had—or, indeed, had he not ?—mentioned to one or other of them " Letters. Yes." Doubtless he had ; his was a graceful and courteous soul, as well as precisely actuarial. His study lay off at the end of a loose and winding passage. He took a pipe out. Quicker brushed his shoes on the carpet. Air-currents, that carry on them a chant, drop—almost to a cavern—and so out of this dinner-jacket and into his coat of grey Shantung. In a while his son would be up to talk over business with him. He remembered so.

## CHAPTER TWO

That was a vacillating mind—Hugh Brabant. It needed strength. He was quite conscious of the need for strength ; but where shall a man turn, when his age feeds into him nothing but fresh revolt ? It seemed to him that he was fated to be a heretic, so naturally did every unorthodox image take root in him. Why must it be so—and always without strength ? Conventions and privilege he had brooded upon, even in the nursery he had brooded upon them ; then came religion—and last of all, the very structure of his civilization,—last and most catastrophic image of them all. Was it, he wondered, that revolt takes root in such a mind as his, because strangely its weakness acts as a manure ? At least, this was a sad fate.

And had he ever, indeed, been happy ? He had a family, and that was unavoidable—a family clinging to him like a web ; and when one turned about, there were twenty other families, a hundred others—in every drawing-room he entered, every studio or office or what not—a hundred families, each with its simple code, established moralities, eyes like hard cold pebbles. How they all numbed him ; and then one took a wife, and again this new creature could not—by its very intimacy—make him anything but more conscious of himself. Here was a woman ; one is not weak before a woman. She probes without knowing that she probes or what she touches. But as for happiness ? Maybe in all this he had known it once, for two or three years maybe. That was his memory of things ; that was his belief. He thought that, for two or three years, he had tasted some privy strength even in the mud and among

the high explosives—had drunk a curious strength by contagion with such men, as seemed themselves to be an elemental force. So he believed. So he dreamed wistfully, searching for that green shawl of hers. He had been happy once.

He wanted to speak about this. Want began to swell in him—a bubble not unlike the old man's bubbles of eccentricity. He hurried downstairs to his wife.

She took her shawl. As soon as they had passed the door and closed it, out of infinity fell air—moist and tenuous—wrapping each for a moment in a cold cocoon. They were silent and dissociated. Clouds covered the sky ; a thin breeze drifted from pine-smells and mould and chestnut-leaf decay ; and darkness seemed to isolate them, till they reached the lawn's edge—and then it was as if they and house and garden were lost in a great bowl of common dissolution.

Curtains were dimly green or brown ; the gramophone was like a gnat's wings. His skin and hers grew sensitive of one another, as though they realized that each brought into this communion a very distinct flood of thoughts. They resented that, even before they spoke.

Silence deepened. His need for sympathy was the first to swell over. As they touched the path under the chestnuts, he said : " How shall I put it ? What ? Is one satisfied, that is—happy ? Or, isn't one wrong to refuse a possible path, even though the confession of it may be a slight to others . . . ? " He broke off ; he was uneasy. It was curious that he could never pass the fringes of this profound feeling, so far as explaining it to her.

" Well ? " she said, moodily—and she had become very much fragment of the darkness ; she wore no perfume.

" Oh, there, let me tell you. I feel that virtue has gone out of me ; and would *you*, my dear, blame me or frustrate me if I looked for fresh energy in my own way—however strange or . . . ridiculous it may seem ? Would you object to my seeming . . . ridiculous in your eyes ? "

" Oh, Hugh, how enigmatic you are. I'm too troubled with my own problems to solve new ones. Yes ? What is it ? "

He began again on a more persuasive note, but she stopped him and said " Yes, but wait—I don't believe you. I don't, because you've grumbled into phrases of that kind a dozen times—every month or so—and it comes to nothing, nothing but the luxury of regrets and memories you never make clear

to me. What is this yearning for strength, loss of vitality or however you put it ? It's never given you spirit enough . . ."

" Ah, but," he said with excitement, " it's all so sharp now ; it never was before. These queer impulses grow till they begin to throb ; mine do—I know them. I've suffered. Call me neurotic if you will. . . ." He was beginning to be careless what she called him ; the need ached in him. " Whatever *you* think of me, I shall have to make a choice. A woman can't expect to know all the secrets of a man's soul ; and where I seek for vitality to . . . to do you credit, you must allow it—you must allow it. I can't face people ; I go limp ; I've lost the force I once thought I'd found—and that is tragedy. To find and lose is tragedy."

She answered plaintively : " What ? I haven't listened to half you said ; don't be angry. They swell up—one's own feelings suddenly swell up, and it's no use. Oh, dear—I shall cry ; why shouldn't I cry ? But that family of yours . . . and, anyway, I hate all families, I do. I shall fight again ; I feel it coming on ; too many months of numbness, respectable and human. . . . For they never thank you for it ; it's a sad life to be human—except that, praise the Lord, there's the chance of hating and wrangling and fighting, and a little sensuality creeps into life. . . ."

She went off into tears among a dark exudation of laurel bushes. It fretted him, but he knew her fits ; when they came, they came—even if rarely—like a phase ; and she never seemed to have swollen eyes after them.

" The family ? " he said, dragged unwillingly into fresh perspectives. " Oh, but you can't. What ? My dear girl, don't *you* make any scenes. Fatal, fatal. . . . What ? You must let me resolve the painful situation myself, in my own time. Please ; oh, please." He was growing more agitated. " You've promised me before. . . ."

" Yes," she said sobbing. " But you won't make it really amusing and exciting and sensuous. You only tickle them and scratch them. But me ? I've kept my promise—well, some of it—but don't they try to drag me into the quarrels, to gaze at me incuriously or deluge me, as your father does, with melancholy grins, or even snub me ? See, you'd better make *them* promise ; because if they don't I shan't "—and with a moistened sniff she rustled away from him and wandered on to the lawn.

He was rather too perturbed to be irritable. He lost her—hurried over the grass himself, turning his head about. A scene in the family might be most unpleasant; Eve could be very unpleasant, when she cared—and, of course, she might not do it, but then she might. Was the grass damp? Not too damp, he found. As for her logic, it was weak, but he had to admit features in it; and one couldn't deny one was in love with the girl, so that *her* standard of strength and forcefulness counted for far more than perhaps it deserved—and then she was crying. "Eve . . .," he said, clearly, willing his voice across the open lawn.

"M'm?" said she, a few yards ahead.

She was brooding there, still rather moist. He touched her arm. "Dear, I allow that you've had some provocation, but—eh? Can one plunge in like that? This is a very peculiar family; I've always granted you that. . . ."

"Oh, it's not at all peculiar, Hugh; every one says that. It's just family—ordinary common family; they're all the same. I know them. I used to think they treated me as they do, because of the way I was brought up—or because I worked in a shop; but that's giving them too much indulgence. Their imaginations are nothing like so precise. It's just family," she said sulking. "I shan't promise. . . ."

"Oh, but you must, my dear girl; scenes would be an absurdity. What could you say? They'd never understand. Supposing you—what?—took your chance on some matter of convention or accepted codes . . . politics, say; and anyhow," he went on drawling, "could you support yourself with argument?"—and they paced along the turf, whispering at one another. The gramophone still buzzed; here fell a chestnut-leaf and the trees were faintly resonant; a cow stirred in the shed across the paddock—stirred again and plunged.

"I shan't do it," he said, knowing he dared not. "It's useless."

"You must," she said. "A family has to be fought."

"Because you ran away from yours . . .," he began.

"I *didn't* run away," she said with a gulp. "I kept on fighting them, till there was no logic except in parting. That's the reasonable way and. . . . Oh!" she cried, catching his arm, "what's that there?"

Before them in the pit of darkness hung a spread and un-

certain mass, without sound—milky and low; and he, too, paused, and said then "Why, of course, the alligator pool—the old man's alligator pool."

A moment later their knees touched the concrete. She drooped over the spot; in surprise she forgot to cry. Her voice sank to a deep, almost boorish, lassitude. "One can't remember . . . and it's so silent. It oughtn't to lie here in such disgusting silence."

She fingered the glass panels that covered the tank; they reflected an uncertain luminance. He slid one open for her—and their tones dropped sudden and dull into the gulf, flattening upon dark water. Sluggishly she spoke, fascinated by an inner dread. He replied with dry phrases; he was still perturbed—and if her mood changed so easily, why should his? Gesturing stiffly and remotely, he mentioned electric heating arrangements and so forth. This was his father's—not his; he allowed it but without sympathy. The air about them chilled. She may have been listening to him.

"A match," she said. "Please."

He handed her coldly his match-box—and did nothing. She struck one. Its flare ran yellow and torch-like along the rippling surface, as she bent and peered; a small log nosed out of the musty shadows; black beyond lay water and she let fall the light. It hissed. They were silent.

"No," she murmured. "No, I couldn't see them."

"They're very young," said he. "They sleep in the shallows with their snouts above water."

"See, it's all quite mad," she said, "and a bit frightening. It gives me pleasant little tremors; I think of negro slaves and brass chains and red torches. . . . But it's all mad—and your family's mad, and as for your father. . . . Well, he's queer and old; and why does he leave a pool like this out on his lawns? And why alligators?"

He moved impatiently. "Oh—what? It's just an eccentricity of his. M'm—marmosets, you know, and tree-frogs, and so on. Shall I close the glass? They shouldn't have too much cold atmosphere . . . or so I gather." He shrugged.

"Ah, but still," she brooded, "how mad it is. And yet he seems so harmless."

"Harmless? Harmless? Of course, he's harmless." He drew the panel with an abrupt click. "He's a dear old creature—and I wouldn't pain him for the world; that is one reason

why I shrink from a premature scene with them all. A very definite reason, perhaps the soundest reason. But, by God, I wish I had half the strength he feels in his convictions. Strength has gone out of me. And him ? Convictions ? It's less a matter of feeling convictions with him—than of living in an all-pervasive element. Simply he never imagines anything else."

It seemed she had no sense of his irritation. She patted her short hair and meditated vaguely—" His thoughts are eccentric ones . . . m'm ? He's nearer to you than any of them ; he's queer." It occurred to her to dab her eyes with a handkerchief and blow her nose. " You might . . . you might get him on our side, if you really talked to him, and then have a blazing quarrel with the rest . . . m'm ? "

He listened. He turned on her. " Yes. I thought so. You're trying to trap me into a scene ; you want me to fight, and I tell you I won't fight, except in my own time . . ."

It startled her—even into clutching his arm. " Hugh ! Oh, Hugh, you are unfair ; and you're silly—and you snapped at me when I was half-asleep, and oh ! . . ." She began to whimper, but this time without tears. " *I* don't see why you shouldn't speak to him. Why shouldn't you, if he's so harmless ?—and I didn't promise, and now I won't promise." She walked a pace.

" Oh, yes," he said, soberly following, " but you didn't understand. You don't know him," he cried, waving a hand. " He and I live in different spheres ; words scarcely mean the same to us. It would be like talking science with a man that believes the sun goes round the earth. Truly. You *must* realize . . ."

" Oh, well," she said, looking from side to side. " How mad it all sounds. Is this so ? Anyway, I'm getting cold ; I shall go in. Are you coming ? "

" Yes, in a minute."

" In a minute ? "

" Yes, yes. You don't need me, do you ? And in any case, I have to run up and see the old man."

" Oh ? " she said. " Why ? "

He mumbled. " He wants to chat over my investments. He always likes to . . . I can't refuse ; he made over to me a very good sum after all."

He left her there and lounged sullenly back to the pool ;

he sat leaning against the concrete lip of it, staring into darkness—and fifty yards head of him sighed and stridulated the copse of elms and evergreens. It was colder ; a faint mist made visible now the surface of the lawn, but he didn't care. All he cared for was strength ; and what this woman meant—her limbs and eyes and voice—was the need for strength. She called for his strength and he gave it ; but what woman, thought he, knows the inwardness of a man ? Does she not—for some strange cause—believe him always inexhaustible ? He was unhappy. His strength was lost and he must rediscover it—and from whom ? A woman does not know that one must seek strength ; her wilful desire, that one should be inexhaustible, makes her despise and fear one's very search for strength. And from whom ? From what source ?

He hadn't heard the front door open and close, or her feet upon the gravel drive. He stirred slowly, raising his head. Had she gone by another way ? He stirred, his skin tingling ; and at that moment she was there, close upon him. " Hugh . . ."

" What—what ? " he said rigidly. " You startled me."

" I'm sorry, Hugh. Hugh, I want to say. . . . It just bobbed up in my mind—what was it ?—you were feeling I made you hesitate and doubt ? Was that it ? Oh, I don't really, do I ? It's not true. . . . You stay out here in the cold alone. Was that what you felt ? "

" Oh, good God, no," he said. " This ? It was before I even met you. But you don't understand ; you never have. Still, whether you understand or no, I must seek for a basis, a hard core ; I must find vitality ; and every man according to his own temperament and I have mine. . . . If I could discover it by solitude, I would—oh, happily enough ; but I lack a special breed, creatures that my body seemed to answer to in astounding ways ; yes, men that I felt—*I* felt, mind you—were themselves a force."

" Men ? " said she.

" Yes, men," said he fiercely. " Why not men. There may be women too ; I don't know. Leave me alone to think ; you can't realize *all* secrets—and besides, it's you that want me to make a scene——" and when she drew away, he called suddenly " Eve."

" Yes," she said pertly from the shadows.

" Eve, I admit you have justification about the family, about

all families maybe. But not this evening. What? Don't create a situation this evening." She was going. He called her name loudly.

" Oh, all right," she answered from the lawn's edge, and he heard her feet lightly on the gravel. The door creaked and closed.

Alone he took a cigarette. Thought would have melted, had he let it, into cold water-drops; but he drew it back. Thought condensed and slowly hardened. He saw that he was obsessed by this hunger for incarnate strength; but who does not suffer some obsession? It is easier to yield. These men—where are they? He felt quite clearly that the uniformed creatures, with whom he once mingled, had long ago melted into Mass. Mass they were and to Mass they had returned. The individual vanished but the Mass lived on; and these individuals had been themselves an elemental force in his eyes, because they were embodied Mass—no more than that. They were the submerged force; they—as his eccentric mind had taught him to believe—would soon tear through the whole texture of his civilization and revolutionize the world. The red tide was rising. These were the very men he yearned for. The image made him shudder; and so organic was his need for them, that he could never confess it to his woman; she would turn furiously upon his organic need for anything but herself. And yet she, too, was obsessed, and her obsession fed his own. She demanded more strength from him; she drove him on to seek strength. One is neurotic, almost insane maybe; but these are abnormal times; and an old man can —without obvious absurdity—have an alligator pool upon Surrey lawns and leave it out all night.

The soul of a crab would be as Mr Brabant lulled there—waiting for his son in the study, olive-green and brown with motionless curtains. He read a Financial Supplement. Out of the waterless air, fired since mid-afternoon as quiet as clay, his pipe's stalk came moist to his lips—withdrew—returned again; the smoke went up and curled like weeds. His large office chair creaked beneath him. He met the door and the arm-chairs under the book-case, over a polished flat table with carved legs to it. At his back, perched high upon its dark wooden cage, a marmoset quivered from time to time and stared down on him with profound eyes; he paid it no attention.

This was Mr Brabant—that had once been West-End

Manager in a great Life Insurance Company, and had found his own careful insurances falling to him regular as seasonal fruits, and almost as regular—quite as inevitable—heavy bequests to himself and to his wife, while death carried away the elder members of their families. Investing and reinvesting he grew soberly under dark soil; moods could one by one find release. His moods were harmless and anarchic; for are not most men parodies of the smoother, the more rhythmical birds and beasts? Aren't they to be sadly contemplated, sadly despised? Humanity . . . he didn't care much about their thoughts, *what* they thought; but he had children, and that was always a surprise to him; they were a factor in his sums he could never trace and establish. It gratified him beyond words when his son after the War had consented that he should get him a job on a firm of Lloyd's brokers. It had both gratified and amazed him. This was life.

When he heard the knock, "Come in," he said. "Come in and take a pew;" and looked at his son under his brows, mildly like a stag, bending forward his white head. "And . . . try a spot of this tobacco, would you like to? Here you are. It's from a Yank concern I took up a few shares with the other day. Excuse me a moment. . . ." He turned to his paper. "Yes. Got it? I think one should support one's own investments. Don't you? Excuse me a moment more. . . ."

Hugh in the silence filled a pipe; here was his father. He lit and glanced; here was the man he'd spoken of out by the pool. He was troubled; his mind washed in distress—why? why? Here so simply embodied with a newspaper—thin nostrils like his own, broad bony chin like his. Why was he so sure that this man inhabited and breathed an element in which he had no part? And why did the certainty of it so horrify him? Be stable then . . . become stabilized; what is the secret? A moment and he will speak. If one were to go Eve's way and grossly scarify these people—these Irenes and Maurices and the rest of them inside the family and outside it—then wouldn't it. . . . Let smoke trickle away and glance anxiously again at him. Then wouldn't the realization of it sink as through a slow and glassy pool into the old man's consciousness? and then. . . . Unthinkable. And then? what then? Unthinkable. He couldn't even *try* to wonder what the old man might say to him, or do. He grew sick with meditation. His pipe went out.

" Hah," said Mr Brabant. " That's that. Yes. A well-written bit of screed, I suppose, but idiotically pessimistic ; it might have been old Margarietson writing it. Do you see old Margarietson at all ? "

" No."

" H'm." He sucked. " Well . . . let's talk. How are things staggering along in the City ? "

" Oh, all right, you know. We're still working on a short staff ; but we're managing to make good with accident business . . . motors. One can pick up quite a deal—and odds and ends, a little live stock."

" Ah, ah."

" There's a general feeling that trade will start to look up a little in the late autumn, you know. They say there's hopes of it."

" Ah, ah."

" They're a bit shy, of course, as to what's coming out of this . . . h'm ; " he mumbled a few words.

" Eh ? " said his father.

" This . . . coal business. The subsidy and the question of this Commission."

" Oh, the coal question. Yes. Yes, no doubt. But *you* know. . . Looking at it frankly . . . a lot of it springs from the damn-fool way they controlled the mines during the War and after it—and then all this prancing about in Germany and upsetting the normal balance of European coal-supply. That's the snag of it all. Don't you think so ? You may differ."

His son gazed at the ground. " I don't know about this . . . reduction of wages, at the moment. Just at the moment, I mean. About the judiciousness of it . . ."

" M'm ? Well, that's for the parties concerned to fight out between them. Eh ? That and keep your money out of coal ; you won't go far wrong *then*." He sucked, smiling. " H'h . . . and keep your money out of coal. That's your philosophy, I suppose. H'h."

" I don't quite understand . . .," said Hugh.

" Yes ? "

" I don't quite understand. You'd call yourself a . . . Liberal nowadays, would you ? "

" Me ? No, I wouldn't. No. Some of the Libs. are all right, of course, but . . . well, Lord bless me, this gas-house down at Westminster, it's all a waste of time and money, you

know. *You* know better than that, don't you ? You know—well, of course, you do—that this Government business is only a sort of commercial undertaking and depends like the rest of us on credits from the banks ; and everything else that goes on there is just eye-wash. People want to gas, that's all it comes to." He jerked his chair round, brooded awhile. " Liberal, eh ? "—and he suddenly glanced at his son with a covert curiosity and his eyes wrinkled. He blinked them and looked slowly from one ceiling-corner to the next. He brooded on. His son lay stretched out in his chair, making no reply.

" I think," said Mr Brabant, at last, " I think, my dear . . . er . . . what's-y'r-name," and stopped in surprise and laughed. " H'h. Strange lapse—yes. My dear . . . er . . . *Hugh*, of course," said he courteously, " that considering how much you and I agree on things, it's a damn pity . . . well, you know, that we can't make these family gatherings, when they have to occur, a little more amicable. A little less choppy. Eh ? "

" M'm . . ."

" I mean, when they *have* to occur ; you and I haven't got any illusions about the sanctity of the family board, of course —any more than we have about a brass-hat and spurs or a parson's come-to-Jesus bowler. But *they* think it's the proper thing, you know ; and one's got to yield here and there. Eh ? "

" Yes, one has," said his son huskily ; " but all the same ; . . ."

" You don't mind me broaching this ? " said Mr Brabant.

" No, no. No. I feel, too, that it's a devilishly knotty point. It is."

" Yes. Quite."

" I try," said Hugh, " to keep things smooth—to suppress my own point of view into the background."

" Oh, yes. I'm sure you do. . . ."

" Well, when I say that," ran on the young man, swallowing and heaving himself, " I've got to keep my own end up. Haven't I ? I've got to tell them what I think . . . something of what I think. Otherwise, I sit there like a damned costive idiot."

" Well . . ."

" I mean—otherwise," said he, again heaving himself loosely, " people will start to think of me as . . . m'm, m'm . . . as

a blasted jelly-fish. One has to support oneself. I mean putting it humorously . . . h'h . . . friends of mine, my own generation that is, think I'm a bit too soft and restrained as it is. I'm sure they do."

" H'm. Well, I don't know. Perhaps," said his father, gazing at him with sad eyes. " But then I looked at life very much as you do ; and I found, and still find, damn it all, that it don't pay to tell people everything you're thinking. They haven't all got the sane modest business point of view that you and I have . . . the point of view that loathes these frips and fraps and prancing tomfoolery like poison. It comes with a knowledge of what figures mean—of what *credit* means ; and even then some of the sanest fellows go wrong—start to croak and get that feeling of awe when a cocked hat comes round the corner. Like old M. for example, old Margarietson. You don't see him much ? No." He sighed and watched his smoke to the ceiling. " No. It's really the . . . War, you know," he said confidingly. " When you suited yourself and went into the ranks. And why shouldn't you ? But so many of them like a one-pip Willie hanging round. That's it. You think that's it ? Don't you ? " He bent across the table with a hand on his brow, smoothing it. " I suppose you think that too."

" H'h'm." Hugh cleared his throat. " It goes farther back than that."

" Oh, yes, yes. Farther back. Yes. . . ."

" *And* what's happened since," said Hugh, slowly ; and glancing round saw his father's misty, fascinated eyes. " What's happened since the War. You know. What's happened since, too." There was dead silence. " I mean," said he, struggling, " subjects of controversy may arise. It isn't only vague ideas about religion or . . . the Royal Family perhaps, or . . . ridiculous institutions of any kind."

" Eh ? "

He hesitated and reddened over his pipe. He said : " Oh, I merely mean that some people think I'm too Bohemian."

" Too, what ? "

" Too Bohemian," he said loudly. " Too fond of living an easy life. Because I'm a quiet, easy fellow, they criticize my type of friends, say they're vulgar or low or whatever you like to call it. See ? "

" Oh, I *see*," said Mr Brabant, dropping back. " Well,

well. H'h. H'h. It's that they feel you've got low friends. I see." He meditated. " H'h. We're damnably alike in some ways, you know. I have a bit of a partiality . . . h'h . . . for common chaps "—and a strange relief seemed suddenly to wash him like a tap ; he stretched his legs ; he smiled ; and Hugh lay in an agony of self-contempt. He tried to speak. His skin grew cold and meaningless. What to say ? How to explain even the margin of his thoughts ?

" What about investments ? " said he stiffly, at last. " What about them ? I've been looking round. Would one, for instance, put anything into a Russian loan if one got the chance ? "

" What ? Credits to the Bolshies ? "

" Yes."

His father was silent ; his frame seemed to droop, quivered slightly. He didn't look round. Then he answered like dull explosions. " No. No, no, of course not. It's a question of credit. That is—reliability. *They*'ll soon learn they can't jigger about with accepted commercial methods. They'll soon come to it and pay up. They'll soon come to it."

" But . . ."

" Hey ? "

" M'm, will they, do you think ? "

" Of course they will. It's only their ignorance of Western business traditions. That's all." He jerked his legs and, getting up, took the marmoset in gentle fingers and returned it to its cage. He sucked his pipe and hung with knitted brows. " Well," he said, " and what about your investments anyway ? "

Failure—and one went on talking ; and suspicion lay on the room filling it with bitter aloe juice—suspicion, not in the old man's consciousness, but down his olive-green walls and in his bones ; no more than that. No more than that yet.

Hugh gazed in upon himself—a creature that shrank from expressing even half his thoughts ; and again he pondered on that hard decision, yearning for the chance to find those men that are themselves a force—to find them and from them drink a little courage. He knew they had it ; who better ?

## CHAPTER THREE

SUNDAY came like a yawn, inevitably sucking him out of dreams ; he was depressed—he woke into a world dry and friable and perfumed with old flower-water. The features of Hugh Brabant floated commonplace before him in the pool of mirrors. He brushed his stiff hair and took to shaving ; and Eve washed, so that he could see her in his glass—full back and shoulders darkened like a dark water-lily, and for a few moments shining stone-wet and then supple ; she flung hands across her short dark hair, lifting her head.

He was fascinated by the soft play of her skin—sudden dropping of her back, sleek rounding and dimpling of her shoulders. He glanced at her again and again ; and still they did not speak.

Huskily, at last, he began. " My dear, you realize we have another day of it here. . . ."

" Hey ? " said she, dropping her hands.

" May I ask you as a favour not to precipitate any crisis ? What ? You must grant me time."

" Time ? " said she, and dropped on the couch and lazily found a stocking. " I don't know . . . I don't see where it involves you, if I want to tell them what I feel. I'm not going to promise. I've lost too much of life."

He turned a suddy and wrinkled face. " How obdurate you are."

" Oh, I am—in this. Why argue ? *You* know well enough what my feelings are ; and I don't see I've had much enjoyment allowed me in life, and anyway . . . anyway, I doubt if humans ever *do* find much enjoyment. Why should I promise ? " She lay back half-naked in the sunlight, yawning with closed eyes. He begged her ; and she merely shook her head.

He begged her apprehensively. " I must at least have a chance of strengthening my will ; I must have a week . . . half a week." He was blinking and creasing his brows. She shook her head again.

They dressed themselves and went down—with their bedroom intimacy folded away—to meet the eyes fresh from all

those bedroom intimacies ; and each group faced each, asking silently, " Have you discussed *us?* How much ? To what conclusion ? "

The morning grew hot towards midday, but with a weight of cold and impetuous airs to come ; the sun alone was hot and clouds like blown cotton gathered steadily about it. Every voice and moist subsidence in the windy garden died like a feeble yawn. The tree-tops were swaying. Miss Dallas at an upper window sat turning leaves of a white and mauve volume ; Maurice and Irene crossed the drive ; Mr Brabant's car slid like a sigh with him towards his golf. On the small veranda lay Hugh alone and smoked, all his back and buttocks sunk deep, as by a household indolence, into the hairy canvas of his chair. He brooded there. Hairiness touched by a hand became goat-foot in his soul—became the hedged Arcadia of that garden.

A voice murmured at his elbow, shyly, " Mr Hugh . . .'

" M'm ? Yes ? "

" Madam says would you like a cup of coffee ? "

" No, thank you."

" Or anything else ? "

" No, thank you. No."

He brooded there. His body turned to a pallid globe, in which sang continuously a faint blue gas ; he was dull as the globe at midnight. What memories ? He recalled the bodies of slow shrewd men that had been all round him in those days of mud and high explosives and chloride of lime. Yes, yes. This was life beyond life now for him, substantial only through its everlasting idea, laid up in the heavens of his domed soul. Those human bodies—they had suffered him to hold commune with them, since he was lost as they were in that mud-coloured sea. The men that were themselves a force . . . and he stirred, and where had they all vanished—under what mud or in what slums and what laborious fields ? They had vanished ; there was no hope ; and he struck a match and drowsed again.

What memories ? He saw them more individualized and tenants of such a trench and such a barn. He struggled to fit names to them. They had been silent as sheep or hoarsely audible ; they had turned by command ; they would commune with him because he, too, was indistinguishable in the same mud-sea and carried the same burdens. *He* had been swallowed in the unconsidered ranks—no more than a number

dropped into the flowing feed of numbers, where rights mean nothing, and so duties mean nothing ; compulsion alone lived on.

Warm sun on tiles . . . does one recollect ? One recollects, and other scenes as well, that were less comforting. There was the bell at school, incessantly tolling his heart out ; and in those days his heart had ached like a bell, not with fear but the horror of responsibilities. Life clouded with responsibilities. " The older ones have gone to the War now, Brabant, and you must take their place." I ? ". . . tone of the old school and discipline and learn leadership against the time when you yourself will be of age." I ? " How long now ? Less than a year more and you will be taking your commission." I ? The bell had ached above him. How could he endure this—to take a commission, and control and punish the dumb bodies of men ? It would be death. The moment came : he spoke to no one and wrote to no one ; he told his family in a brief note, hid himself at a recruiting-station under the muddy sea of numbers . . . world without end.

What memories ? He thought again of his decision to recapture that lost intimacy. The men that were themselves a force . . . *they* had vanished, but there were millions more. Why had he so long shrunk from finding them ? He scarcely knew why. What memories ?—the revolt that had gathered in slow brains and echoed to his own. Nothing but the dull fume of revolt lifting itself against fatigue, restraint, time's waste and the racking of human entrails—revolt eternal, whispered or mused upon or whined. What memories ? What . . .?

" What ? Ah . . . ah, you, Aunt Mildred. Let me yawn a moment. What ? No, I'm not asleep. No. How goes the Sabbath ? Have you meditated ? Have you prayed ? read in your breviary ? "

" Thank you," said she. " To my own satisfaction."

" H'm. Have you ? Record my shortcomings, for they're many."

" I was wondering if you'd like a game of billiards."

" Oh." He gazed up at her ponderance—enjoyed it warmly. " Charming of you. It composes itself then with your soul-exercises of a Sabbath ? Eh ? " He enjoyed that ocean of a woman with her immodest certainties and the coarse challenge

of her menopause. " Very well then. Let me clear my brain for it. Do you know what it's like to have one's skull blown slowly up with laughing-gas ? " He rose and stretched.

In the vacuous billiard-room, greenly becalmed, he took a cue and thought and said, " Yes. How much do you understand of me I wonder ? "

" As much as is good for you, my dear Hugh."

" H'h. I might have expected that. Will you lead off ? How much d'you . . .? I'm sure my soul is diseased this morning, Aunt Mildred—sodden like a blackberry. Do you admit the Confessional in your particular dogma ? That's not too bad a twist ? Do you ? "

" Do I . . . *what* did you say ? "

" Admit of the Confessional. No, no, I'm in earnest. Or as near in earnest as I'll dare to be at this stage. Dear old lady, you're abundant enough, I do think, to embrace all creeds and temperaments . . . and all classes—aren't you ? It's a . . . h'm tricky for a cannon . . . it's a queer household, and you think, as they all do, that I'm the queer element in it ? You're bound to think so."

" Really ? " said she.

" Well, well, of course, you are. You're curious about me . . ."

" Not at all," said she. " Because as for creeds, I suspect you have none worth my embracing . . . so far. And your temperament, my dear, I understand, and can most sincerely vibrate in feeling with it. I. . . . Would you mind if I came there ? "

" Sorry. Yes ? Go on."

" M'm ? "

" Yes ? " he said impatiently. " Yes ? and what about classes ? What do you think about classes ? "

She looked at him squarely. " What do I think . . .? No. No, I'm afraid this is where you become too technical for me. Or too oracular. I always understood, my dear Hugh, that your birth put you in the same class as myself—no lower and no higher."

" Agh. That's absurd. Lower . . . higher . . . lower ; I really thought *you* were too ample for these distinctions. God ! how some people disappoint me that I'd imagined of a large and comprehensive . . . soul. Well, soul. It's your kind of word. I won't say intelligence."

" H'h. Thank you."

" Ah no, I didn't mean to insult you. I'm sick of looking for sympathy—that's all. My conscience," said he, reddening, " tells me to feel a brotherhood with all races and creeds and . . . classes ; and common-sense makes me reconcile my mind to political changes ; but oh, my God ! " he hurried on, " if I dare hint of my thoughts in this family, I get nothing but cold antagonisms. They won't listen ; they wonder if I'm mad. Even *you* are guilty ; confess it,—that you lack sympathy for me."

" Oh, come now, my dearest lad." She laughed throatily. " H'h. Don't tell me you mean this ; and even now I haven't got at the root of the malaise. Surely," said she, leaning over her cue, " if any mind endeavoured to embrace all creeds and colours—in fact, all mankind—under one profound sympathy, it was that inspired woman who, I own, has taught me more than any other. T't ! a very bad shot."

He said nothing. Recovering in a while, " H'h," she laughed, " I was just meditating on what stern minds and callous skins you will demand in your poor children. Dear me . . . and when *are* you going to start your family, by the way ? "

" Is there any hurry ? "

" Not in the least, as far as I know. The idlest curiosity. I thought it was the fashion nowadays to settle quite vulgarly on dates and even sexes."

" M'm," said he.

" T't. So modern and so extremely reticent ? "

" Well, quite vulgarly," said he, " *I*'ve settled to have none at all . . . apart from accidents. You asked, so don't look surprised. You asked . . . then *I* think our class is best down a blind alley ; the world doesn't seem to me to have much further use for us. You *asked* me."

" Really ? I suppose one can hold such opinions. But I do resent this element of jerkiness in one's affairs. The quiet unfolding of generations is a sight I nurse rather fondly. Rather fondly, I do admit. And what about Evelyn ? "

" What ? Oh, she agrees with me, of course. Goes beyond me if anything. What d'you suppose ? "

" I accept. I accept. Hair bristling a little this morning ? H'h, when I recall what excellent friends we are. . . . Do you hear anything ? "

" A car, isn't it ? Some friends of Maurice's are coming to lunch. What's their name ? "

" Grimball."

" How many are there ? " said he.

" M'm . . . two, I believe. *Père et fils*. Say, twenty more up ? Will that suit you ? "

" Two hundred, if you like."

" Twenty."

Wheels like a wave came answering no question—withdrew round the house. Click—spinning this way or that. Click. Some one had arrived. After a time she, too, withdrew, and he was sitting on the edge of the billiard-table, meaningless patch of Sunday morning that cracked occasionally into yawns. His eyelids were unbearable but sweet.

" Yes," he said. " I'll come in a moment. Yes, I'll come." She closed the door. He sat on the table's edge and twirling his cue, wondered about Eve—where she was all this time, and what she had been doing. These were uneasy thoughts ; he swayed under them and again promised himself that there should be no more delays ; the hard antidote for this weakness must be sought and crushed into him. To-morrow it should be—and now perhaps one had better uproot from this green lassitude and crawl out to offer a hand. Sighing, he replaced his cue.

On the drive near the chestnuts were Maurice, Evelyn and a third—a fair young man, sunburned, with blunt features ; away down a path towards the copse strolled Mrs Brabant with a stouter, balder form, gesticulative head and hands in lounge-coat pockets. Space was covered.

" Mmm—this is Geoffrey Grimball, y'know," said Maurice. " At school with me, y'know. My brother-in-law, Hugh—mmm." He blinked at them.

" . . . Warmer to-day," said Mr Grimball, who kept tight lips and paused before he spoke. Yes, it was warmer. Yes. A cigarette was offered to Hugh ; the others were smoking.

" Mmm—Grim and I were at school together, you know," suggested Maurice.

" Oh. Oh, yes . . ."

" He's just come back from West Africa," said Eve. " And he's got six months' leave. Now, you know everything. That's quite . . . m'm ? "

" . . . That's absolutely right," said Mr Grimball, courteously, and put his head on one side. " That *is* so. Yes."

" Oh ? Oh, yes, I heard everything, I think. In the Civil Service, isn't it ? What ? "

Mr Grimball, turning on heel to face him replied, ". . . Yes. The West African Colonial. You have it."

One swayed vaguely ; the sun was hard and bright and one blinked at the tossing chestnuts. Mr Grimball took another stare at Eve, mingling into it a pertness and a fine humility.

Hugh began heavily that he supposed Mr Grimball was glad to have a rest. It apparently went without saying. " Oh, yes. Yes. . . . But some fellows one comes across," said Hugh, " like keeping to the collar." *Some* fellows no doubt did. " One must get a vastly different perspective out there on the West Coast—an entirely different standard of space and time, for example. Such huge distances."

" . . . That's right," said Mr Grimball, struggling with huskiness. " H'm. One has immense areas to cover."

" Mmm—devil of a responsibility," thought Maurice.

" . . . Well, a fellow gets used to it," said he becomingly towards Eve. " That's the surprising fact. I'm quite hardened to being responsible now. Yes. A fellow comes to enjoy it—wouldn't be without it ; it's a matter of making rapid decisions that grow into second nature."

" Quite. Quite. I used to loathe operations for a few weeks ; but now I'd think nothing of cutting a chap open or chopping his finger off, if it came to it." Maurice rubbed his palms gently together. " Mmm, quite."

" Yes, but *you* have your people under anæsthetics. That's easy. Wait till you find a nigger who's torn his leg open, or got a bit mauled, and you're without anæsthetics of any kind, and have to work on him with a bottle of iodine and a first-aid case. H'h—h'h, h'h—h'h. I . . . God ! tell you I've sweated sometimes. H'h—h'h."

" That's where perspectives alter," said the woman lazily.

" Oh, sure thing," replied Mr Grimball. " Absolutely. That's a good word of yours—perspectives." He smiled at her. " You see, you can do things out there . . . h'm . . . chance your arm in a way you couldn't over here. It's like dealing with children." He looked into the distance. " I've had the pleasant job of condemning fellows to death," said he, modestly. They swayed slightly. To death ? What ? " Sure

thing. They're children ; but we're there to keep the peace. Always a chance of this Human Leopard business creeping up again unless we're quite ruthless with it. Absolutely. You . . . have to carry it out yourself, too," he added with a rush.

Dead silence. " Mmm—the execution ? " said Maurice.

" Absolutely. There's really no one else often to do the dirty work ; and I had a doctor there once who was supposed to certify death."

" Didn't he ? "

" . . . Sick as a dog," said Mr Grimball, " and wouldn't go near the corpses. My job again. That's the sort of thing. H'h." He looked at Eve. " I say, this conversation is a trifle sickening ; let's change it."

" M'm ? You thinking of me ? " said she, pacing a few feet up and a few feet down, and glancing over her shoulder. " God ! I'm not squeamish. You mustn't judge women too broadly."

" No, no. No, really. I felt you . . . wanted to understand what the actual conditions were."

" That's right. Yes. I'd hate to do it myself, of course ; but . . . I don't know. I'm beginning to think that if you believe in a job you might as well do it properly, whatever it is. Life's mad, anyway ; "—and she tossed her head and hummed ; and left no clear vent-hole to the conversation. They eyed her. Mrs Brabant and the elder visitor were coming to mingle with them.

" Hugh, dear, I think you're the only one that hasn't met Colonel Grimball."

" How d'y'do ? "

" How d'y'do. H'm. You're the . . . young man that served in the ranks during the War."

" Yes."

" Ah. Aha. Are y'fit now ? "

" I . . . wasn't wounded."

" No, no. No. I was merely making a social inquiry."

" I've always been pretty fit, thanks. Why ? "

The Colonel swayed awhile—turned blue eyes smartly on him. " We'll have to talk about it ; though I wasn't out there. Eh ? No. On the Plain the whole time ; and . . . speaking bluntly . . . I was a bit startled when I gathered you hadn't held a commission. Let's be frank."

" Why ? "

" Oh . . . h'h . . . my own views about the duties of our class. My dear chap, no offence. Merely speaking bluntly, y'know, speaking bluntly. Delightful garden your father has here."

They talked, prowling occasionally like panthers to and fro ; Mrs Brabant glanced at her wrist-watch. The car, arriving from the golf-course, flashed out past the laurels—vanished round the house corner ; and Mr Brabant was no more than a shadow until, with the palpitation of the gong, he appeared tall and despondent on the doorstep. He resigned his hand.

They went in. Mrs Brabant placed the Colonel at table next to her husband ; and he after one helpless glance at her said, " I suppose you, too, play golf . . ."

" I do," said the Colonel, " now and then," and while the tableful growled in syllables through its fish, they spoke of golf and then of golf-courses ; and the Colonel leaning suddenly on an elbow, said, " But, y'know, it boils down like everything else to a question of scientific management. H'm. What's yours like ? "

" Mine ? "

" Y'club. Do they manage the employees well . . . the caddies ? "

" I suppose so."

" Scientific," said the Colonel, taking a couple of mouthfuls, " management is one of m'hobbies. I was attracted towards it during the War. I've got a farm or part farm, part nursery garden, y'know, and they sent m'wife down a dozen Boche . . . prisoners of war . . . to increase the staff. I was on the Plain, but I got down to the problem. It flashed upon me . . . question of wills. You see ? My will that they should work so much against their will that they shouldn't . . . putting it bluntly. H'm. I designed a series of simple tests —loading, digging, planting—kept me amused for weeks." He paused and looked at Mr Brabant.

" Oh."

" You follow me ? "

" I suppose so."

" I've never stepped back. I employ now thirty-six men and women in all ; and all the while in my use of scientific organization I keep m'finger on one thing," said the Colonel, setting a forefinger between himself and Mr Brabant's plate.

" How am I to increase my will to equal their collective wills."

" Oh, well, I may be all to blazes," said Mr Brabant, fidgeting in his chair, " but I suspect this organization stuff. It makes trouble. It's . . . irritating in the very conception."

" No, no, *no*. Y'miss the whole point. It *would* be irritating, grant you, but taking the army method as a model . . ."

" I'm judging by that," said Mr Brabant, with an engaging smile. " I was in the volunteers myself once. For three months. And *I* was thoroughly fed up with it."

" You were ? "

" I was."

" H'm." The Colonel ate, letting his eyes rove ; at last he jerked forward. " H'h—h'h. Y'don't mind m'saying so, Brabant, but I suspect . . . h'h—h'h . . . I suspect in you one of those gentlemen who used to bombard the papers with correspondence, as to whether this or that couldn't be done for the Tommies. Hot-water bottles in the trenches . . . what ? No, no, just my joke," and rather dubious laughter, flourishing of napkin and a good draught of whisky. " H'h—h'h. H'm."

" Do you know these parts well ? " said Mr Brabant kindly, after a silence.

## CHAPTER FOUR

LUNCH ended ; and screwing up eyes at light clouds blown feebly across, and a dull quiescent landscape, they suggested —" a car-ride ? " " Yes." The two young couples could pack with Geoffrey Grimball into Mr Brabant's car, and Maurice was a good driver. They fluttered about, preparing ; the Colonel more rooted and digestive drank coffee in the drawing-room—cut a cigar.

Miss Dallas loitered to and fro and found Irene peeping every way in the porch and biting a lip and turning up the collar of an embroidered coat. " Hullo, Aunt Mildred, have you seen any of them ? They're a lazy crew. I've been dancing here alone for minutes."

" Have you ? Well . . . I don't know into which of the

men's bedrooms you suppose I've been. Because otherwise I could tell you nothing."

" H'h." She glanced round, her mind vaguely registering —witticism . . . to be smiled at socially ; she took in Miss Dallas from the corner of eyelids and thrust fingers into gloves. " H'h. Is it going to rain, d'you think ? "

Miss Dallas advanced to the drive's edge, and after brooding awhile said, " Perhaps ; but I'm no prophet. I shall write four letters this afternoon ; that's the extent of my prediction."

" Write . . . ? "

" I said four letters."

" Oh."

Miss Dallas gazed at her, fidgeting pince-nez out of their case. " That very pleasant embroidered coat—is it new ? "

" About a month."

" Quite so. H'm. May I . . .? Tasteful shades of green and magenta. Did you make it yourself, my dear ? "

" Me ? You know I couldn't do anything like this."

" Can't you ? said Miss Dallas and, after further study, she added, " I recall you can't."

Moodily descending at last, they climbed into the car and flickered away past the laurels, and the drive stood empty awhile. Mr Brabant and the Colonel crawled out with pipes lighted and golf-clubs in their hands. They reached the lawn ; the Colonel was speaking. " Purely provocative. There's no other phrase to fit it. I can stick a lot but not direct provocation. It makes m'gorge rise."

" Well, of course," said Mr Brabant, cautiously, " I don't understand Art myself."

" Art ? No, no. No. I flatter m'self I have a taste ; any man of culture has a taste. But here in all its nudity is the unqualified smirk of Germano-Jewish Bolshevism. Absolutely unqualified."

There was a pause. " What I don't follow," replied Mr Brabant, humbly, " is that you say these painters and literary fellows and what-not are . . . satisfied, you know, with the bit of carving and paid up the spondulics for it ; and that the parson don't object to having it in his church. Eh ? I don't see where your point comes in. If," he essayed juridically, " this what's-his-name—this Silberstein has carried out his contract and hasn't bilked 'em of a few blocks of marble . . ."

His voice was drowned under the Colonel's volley, but he concluded. He said something about " legality," and later, " obscenity " ; he looked very bored. " I'll send y'the picture. I'll send y'the picture post-card. You'll agree with me, a man like you with cultured British mind and father of a family. A naked female conceived with the most outrageous lewdness. No top to her head, no brain, and . . . ." The Colonel swayed nearer and hissed from the side of his mouth, " All thighs, y'know, and bosoms and—well—stomach." He padded his short hands about his own body and snorted. " See ? that's what it is. Says it represents Eve. You know, wife of Adam . . . h'm. Blasphemous Jewish skunk. Pure provocation. The Vicar is as mad as the rest of them. It makes m'blood boil." He straddled on the edge of the putting-green and looked more squarely at Mr Brabant. " The fact is that you in your seclusion don't realize the danger of this kind o' thing. When indecent stuff of this description receives the benediction of the Church, and the . . . h'm . . . accepted judges of good taste, don't y'know, it acts like a poison among the ignorant masses. Like poison. We have fools in our own class ; that's the worst of it. But I'll send you the picture. You shall form your own opinion, and I shall welcome it abundantly."

" Yes," said Mr Brabant. " Thank you. Will you have first putt ? "

The car scampered on, blown across the country-side ; off round this corner eccentrically and then round that. Maurice drove smoothly ; he could peel about a corner with hat well back on his head. One drowsed deep, turning over the savours of inexertion for a time. Here were fields, plantations, villages, —quite so. One tipped cigarette-ash from the side like thistle-down ; speed was invoked ; and speed came with their bodies draped upon it, careless as corpses.

Hugh stirred. He realized suddenly that he was with Irene in the dicky—and the rest in front. This was surprising. He couldn't imagine how it had happened. He glanced suspiciously at her with a yawn and offered her a cigarette.

She took it, peering at him ; she lit it from his steady match and leaned back—" Well ? "

He said, " Well ? "

She was distrustful. " Do you think the weather will hold up ? "

" Probably. I wouldn't prophesy."

" Oh. Who was it said that."

" I don't know."

" It was Aunt Mildred, before we started," she said, shrugging and twisting her body. " I don't know . . . I suppose I'm oversensitive, but I find I can't endure the caustic style. I just can't . . . endure it." She meditated. " It makes my bones itch. I confess it to you." She dropped her eyelids on him and raised them wide waiting.

" Meaning me ? " he said at last.

" Oh, you see. You can't help it. What an acid remark. You take advantage of my admission—my honest admission to you. No, no. It's no good making excuses now."

" My dear girl. . . ." He creased his face wearily through his hand. " I implied nothing. We must have come to a bad pass. Let me confess in turn . . ."

" M'm ? "

" I said—let me confess in turn ; do understand I don't want to hurt you or any of you. I wish you could see that."

" I wish I could."

" Yes. I know . . . but, you see, our family has always been a strangely gregarious one. Not sociable but gregarious —and rather childish."

" Oh, we have," said she warming.

" Yes. And I suppose I've always been jealous of you, because you're the elder ; and no doubt you've always been jealous of me."

" Oh, I haven't. That's ridiculous. What's the good of talking like that ? Here—I *admit* I'm probably oversensitive, and maybe I'm a bit childish ; there's no harm in being a child as long as one can. Is there ? Well, I admit it ; but allowing for all that—you hurt me and you hurt Mother . . . and other people, too. You know you do."

" Well . . .? " he said, morosely.

" Well, can't we talk about it ? You said you'd confess too."

" I was confessing."

" You weren't."

" Yes, I was. I was trying to trace the growth of this painful disharmony. It must go back for years and years . . ."

" I wish you wouldn't mumble, Hugh. I can scarcely hear."

" Oh, pardon me—pardon me," he said loudly. " I was explaining how early my opinions came into consciousness."

" What opinions ? "

" Oh ! " He stared dumbly at her, and then said, " Why—the opinions you accuse me of harbouring . . . queer opinions, catastrophic opinions."

" I've never accused you of definite *opinions*. I'm very interested ; mayn't I hear about them ? " She was turning her neck from side to side. " What opinions ? " she cried with sudden shrillness.

" Of what do you accuse me ? "

" What are these opinions ? "

" Of what do you accuse me ? "

" You ? " said she, blinking. " Fundamentally of having a cynical and . . . untidy mind. When I say untidy, I don't refer to your clothes. On the whole you dress well—though I wish you wouldn't mix with the most careless kind of Bohemians."

" My dear girl, you're not going to talk about clothes ? "

She flicked her cigarette. " You see—there is an instance. One can't discuss your clothes or your friends, because you have an untidy mind. You lack the proper pride ; and . . . take your business, too. How many times have you spoken of your business among my friends as though you were no more than a hall-porter, or as though you ran some shady concern ? "

" Snobbery."

" It's not snobbery," she said fiercely. " In your mind there's a hunger for destruction. You search for the tiniest of fears and discomforts and you torment them till they crawl. If there's a war or a strike or a bankruptcy, your face brightens ; you become really happy." She gazed at him coldly. " Well ? What are these opinions of yours ? I want to hear."

" H'm."

" Aren't you going to tell me ? "

" Yes, yes. In a moment. I'm just thinking over what you've said."

" Thinking over . . .? "

" Yes, yes. Wait a moment." He lay brooding ; there were other speculations. All the while he'd been looking down on Evelyn between Maurice and Mr Grimball. It was a close nest ; while the car scurried, up had coiled in the wind talk and often laughter. He watched. Her full cheek came round over a grey fur collar.

He bent lazily down with arms upon the hood. What interested them so much ?

" Have you thought about it yet ? " said Irene.

" What ? "

" Have you thought about it ? "

" Oh, give me a minute," he said. " Give me a minute."

He threw casual eyes ahead and could hear—not everything ; but torn-away fragments. Eve was telling Grimball :

" Yes, I was born and brought up in the country. You ought to be able to recognize that. I speak quite a lot like a countrywoman might . . . 'specially when I'm excited. You listen."

Mr Grimball, reddening slightly, had thought it assumed.

" Assumed ? Why ? "

" Might be . . . because it's rather becoming. Suits you ? What ? "

" Hoh, Lord ! H'h. D'you s'pose I'd take the trouble ? "

" No. No. Though it does, I mean," said Mr Grimball, staring at distances.

" Does what ? "

" I mean, sound jolly pleasant and natural. Absolutely. It affects a fellow, who's been hearing nothing but native dialect for years, in a most overwhelming way. You wouldn't mind me saying that if you understood. . . . I mean, it's like seeing the wild-flowers and the hedges again. Where were you born ? "

" Oh, in Devonshire. My mother was a farmer's daughter see ? And my uncles are farmers."

" Oh . . ."

" My father was the parson."

" Oh. Oh, yes. Quite. M'm . . . I suppose a lot of vicars and so on marry in with the landowning farmers ? "

" No, they don't. Oh, no."

" H'm," said Mr Grimball, taking a cigarette with care. " Ye-es. I suppose they're . . . deceased ? What ? I mean, you said they *were* the parson and so on."

" Oh, Lord, no. They're still alive ; but I haven't seen 'em for years . . . since half-way through the War. I ran off. I couldn't stand it. Of course, I *hear* from 'em now and then ; but nothing on earth'll persuade me to go back."

" Why ? " said he curiously.

" Hoh . . . I don't know. They're strict, cold and mean.

They're human beings o'course, and a human being *is* limited anyhow by duties and responsibilities, but then . . . they needn't be so damnably mean and moral about it. They're afraid. Take the farms, for example, they try to buy 'em, and then they get caught with a mortgage or something and get all worried about money and . . . oh, well, *you* know. At least that's what it was like round our way and it's spreading. They fidget me."

A village scudded past them with echo and Hugh drew back ; he felt it very cold. He found his sister looking at him. " H'm," he said at last. " I suppose I could describe my opinions. Yes."—What were they doing now ? Still talking, and she bent over and answered—in a whisper, for some reason —Hugh bit his lip. The hopeless wide pastures rose and wheeled on every side.

He turned to speak ; and, as he turned, suddenly—outrageously—he was flung against Irene ; and a piercing yelp had risen from beneath their very wheels. Twirl of car and jamming of brakes—a dizzy half-circle to the roadside ; and career thickened in a breath, blurred, ceased with a tremulous palpitation. One was amazed by silence—the fluttering of birds.

They disengaged ; they were excited. Stiffly they craned their heads about and spoke all at once in a confusion of words. Mr Grimball would hate to have run over a dog. Irene thought Maurice might go and have a look ; she blinked rapidly.

" Very well, m'dear. Yes. Yes, rather." He climbed out and walked back to the small white terrier, that sat shivering in the dust. It stared alternately at the car and over its shoulder. They warmed with indulgence, till they saw—they all saw together—that a heavy man in an old bowler hat was, slowly as a wood-louse, moving towards Maurice—and he had some relation to that terrier ; and Maurice was straightening his back and glanced at them anxiously.

They hesitated, and then curiosity began to stir. Mr Grimball muttered that one might stretch one's legs ; they found themselves drifting from the car towards that little group. They drew step by step along the dust ; their eyes were big. Everything had grown very quiet and somnolent.

The man stood and gazed ; his arms hung like a dummy's. He was tired out. Dust lay on his boots and his dropping

moustache ; his cheeks bulged and quivered, lumps of pale flesh seamed with tiny veins.

A voice left the creature—" That's my little dog."

" Mmmm—quite, George. Quite. It's all right. Really. We haven't touched him ; he's only frightened."

" That's my little dog."

" Yes, yes, I know, George," said Maurice. " Yes, of course. He's not hurt. I'm a doctor and I give you my word. He's not even touched."

" Ough . . . H'm." His small blue eyes drowsed about the terrier—and the bunch of them—and Maurice. " So, you're a doctor ? " Maurice, swallowing, nodded.

" H'm. Well, you don't look . . . like . . . a doctor ; but there,"—he mused thickly—" it takes all sorts t'make a world, as the saying is," and coughed till he could spit. " P'raps you *are*." They stirred uneasily. " I'm a boilermaker myself."

" Oh ? H'h. Yes ? "

" Yes." He began to nod gently. " I'm a boilermaker. I'm on the tramp up to London. I come from S'thampton yesterday. Yes. It's gone stiff for my trade in S'thampton jus' now, and they don't . . . want . . . me anyway ; whoever else gets his cards when they're turning'm off, it's me. Yes. It was that unofficial strike las' year if you heard of it. I don't suppose you did . . ."

" Er . . . no. No. Putrid luck, what ? Well, shall we . . . "

" So at last I says to my wife—' I'm through,' I says ; ' they haven't broken my spirit,' I says ; ' I'd do it again if the time came, an' to hell with 'em. If you've married a man as was to be victimized,' I says, ' then you've married such a man.' Yes. She's a good woman, my wife." They were all prickling ; they rubbed their knees together. Mr Grimball was moving his neck and uttering small grunts. Maurice had become a forgotten smile. " That's a good little dog," said the man, glassy with fatigue.

" Yes," said Irene, quickly. " We'll have to go."

" Yes, yes, we must."

" Yes."

" Mmmm — so long, George. We're glad he's not hurt . . ."

They managed to unstabilize—shuffled a few paces. " Good day."

" Good day."

" Glad he's not . . . h'm."

" Yes, glad he's not . . . h'm."

The boilermaker let sound like a cork. " What ? " and the flow spumed after, " you goin' on a'ready ? Goin' on ? "

They jerked nervously, all eyes. His large lip had dropped open ; his face flushed in a second. It was the unconsidered man—something deeper, man sick beyond thought with loneliness—something deeper still that Hugh heard, with a gasp. " Now, jus' stop a minute. I want you t'stop a minute. I want t'say a word to you before you *go on*." A force crept into his arms at last. " Now you ladies an' gentlemen, stop your car . . . you stop your car for a . . . dog. An' do you know why you stop your car for a dog ? Do you know ? It's because a dog forms part o' *your* world. They're in-offensive. They don' talk about it. They don' make a mouth about it. That's why." He'd come close to Irene ; he was dropping a forefinger again and again upon one button of her embroidered coat. They breathed loudly and stirred about him ; she edged back whitening with screwed eyes.

" What ? " he belched. " No, no, not before I've had a word with you. I wan' a word with you."

" And I want a word with *you*," said Mr Grimball, skipping in. The group relaxed and strayed. He dug hands panting into coat-pockets and faced the boilermaker with chin like a rock. One looks these fellows straight in th' eyes. " Now, then," said he.

The boilermaker had the words. " Hoo . . . y'son of a blasted gun you. Taped you I did th' moment I saw you. I've seen you before an' I don't forget faces, or, if it wasn' you, it was like as makes no odds. Saw you scabbin' at S'thampton in the railway strike. I did. I took a good sight on you or your bloody brother . . ."

" You must *come* away," cried Irene, and Eve said, " Come away," and Maurice was herding them towards the car ; and it was Hugh that found himself close against hot breath, and those circling blue eyes ; and his whole body was flowing, corrupted with desire and self-immolation. It was not shame but sacrifice. He didn't know what he said, knotting words together ; his tongue spluttered over them. " 'Say, old man, . . . 'say, old chap, what's the use ? What's the use ? They're not worth it. Can't you see ? What is the use ? I know you

don't want it from me, but I want to . . . I'd like to give. The time will come, you know." What was he whispering? "Here, here . . . yes, please. If you don't mind." He left the coin in the weak palm. "I hope you get on. I hope you find work." He'd turned his back. He was in the car. They had started it up and off with a blazing glory and slid from bend to bend. One would be late for tea.

Only a few miles, but the car grew immediately tight and dumb—a roost of vague suspicions. They all clove deep into it, sulking forward over cigarettes; Maurice had the best of it, ripping clean round corners with a fine economy of hand-work, surgically precise. The rest, excepting Eve alone, sucked in smoke and blew it out with burst of swollen breath and wondered what their neighbours thought of them. The problem of it all became foul and gaseous; a fresh medium was indispensable; and by the time they reached the inn door, they were fit to fall apart, and did so, expanding their bodies and stretching their arms. They stamped their feet; they did not venture to question faces. Tea-table was the place—tea-table.

Reassorted there after a seemly pause—and bathed by a coal fire—they could see faces at last; and almost felt themselves in fresh company. The event dropped behind them. Tea was set. Hugh alone seemed to his own mind shrunken and dyspeptic, playing with bread and butter and suffering fits of silent eructation; he saw them all as hardened and calculative eyes. They would speak in a moment.

Maurice said, "Mmm—yes. That dog . . ." He gazed from the window.

"Yes?"

"Mmm—well, I was wondering how many of you noticed it. I did, of course; but then I'm looking out for it."

"*What?*"

"Oh, chronically frightened, you know. His spirit's broken. Ill-treatment."

A spoon or two rattled suddenly. Irene came in. "Heavens! How wicked. We ought to have taken it away with us. I wish we had. I should have *laughed* if we had."

"Ah, well, the man, m'dear . . ."

"A man who ill-treats a dog has no right to it."

Hugh felt his mouth burst open; he bent with apprehension of himself. "And where in God's name would you

take it to ? The Vivisection Department at Guy's ? Your pretty inventions . . ," and a spasm of his throat caught the words as in a fist ; he couldn't speak—he looked mutely across, struggling to hide it.

" Absurd," cried his sister ; and Maurice, dusky and stumbling, said, " W-well, you know . . . well, I've never worked in the Path. Lab. as it happens, and I wouldn't care to, I don't think ; but I can tell you I've come across some fellows who ought to be experimented on much sooner than the dogs they keep. A poor little beast like that relies," said he, blinking with gravity, " on decent treatment and care ; he can't make it for himself."

" . . . H'm. The fellow was coarse," began Mr Grimball, with a hot costiveness. " H'm." He felt sultry ; he wanted time.

There was hurry of agreement ; he was—yes, he was, whatever else, certainly coarse and . . . " Oh ? " said Eve, waking suddenly with a cup in air. " Oh ? Coarse ? I rather liked him." She glanced at Hugh out of the corner of her eye, and stared childishly at Mr Grimball. " Didn't *you?* "

" H'm. No."

" What ? "

" I said I didn't."

" Why not ? "—and they reasoned with her irritably, leaning over the table and pointed with forefingers that she couldn't have noticed . . .; and Hugh said nothing. They frowned, but they weren't severe. " Yes," she said, " but he was tired."

" Oh, well . . ."

" And we annoyed him, too, because after all he'd done a lot of work."

" Oh, well . . ."

They showed her that there were exceptions. Maurice, who had felt need of a cigarette, stood the match quivering on the cloth under his finger. " An exception, you see. Some of 'em are excellent boys, most lovable boys. Some on my panel, I like nothing better than having a chat with 'em. I wanted to get on well with this one. Y-you know I did. I did ; but he's a thoroughly stunted and warped specimen." The match snapped and he brushed the pieces fretfully to the floor. " Don't you see ? "

" Ah, but the point is," said Mr Grimball, in a series of

bubbles, " this beggar was insolent and coarse in front of women. Damned rude."

" Ho ? Insolent to *you* in front of women ? " said Eve quickly. " Was that the bother ? "

He corrected himself angrily. " Insolent *to* women I meant."

" Can't we judge for ourselves ? "

" Oh, well, Mrs Brabant, if you're going to take it that way,"—he glanced at Hugh—" well, I've nothing more to say. Probably in the tropics I've grown a trifle old-fashioned ; you'll have to forgive that. H'm . . ."

The fire was too hot ; some one drank noisily ; Eve shrugged and said, " I think, if you ask me, that we're annoyed with the man because he told us we have more consideration for dogs than for human beings. Well, we have, haven't we ? Most times "—and Hugh sat phraseless, chewing cake.

She got no answer. Mastication went on distractedly and cups met saucers with a sharp lack of precision ; till they managed with an effort to change the topic. Something had happened. What was it ? Uncertainty ; but it seemed as though one couldn't discuss the savour of this event without the stirring of ghosts—even here, even among ourselves alone. Cake ceases to be cake and one eats with a sticky leverage of the lips. Treachery lies—one would almost fancy—in the very midst of us ; and suspicion breeds miserably. Eyes hung vaguely awhile on one set of features and on another.

They finished and strolled into the garden. The air was grey and the wind lower ; smoke puffed sideways from the old brick chimneys. Hugh walked with Evelyn, and when they spoke it was in syllables ; they were only together because they didn't care to be seen apart. The rest rubbed against one another in corners like birds.

Mr Grimball—still deeply pained, but seeing at last the Brabants some yards away behind a cage of roughened apple-tree trunks—managed to ask ". . . I say, who is she ? "

" Who ? " He twitched his head. " *Who ?* D'you mean Eve ? Hugh's wife ? "

" Yes, yes, I know that ; but . . . queer sort of girl ? What ? "

" Oh . . . yes, perhaps. But *we* don't mind her, you know."

" Oh, no, no. Of course. I mean. . . . H'm. . . . She

said she was brought up in the country and ran away. What ? "

" Yes. That's right. Hugh met her two or three years ago in one of these artistic circles or clubs or something."

" Oh ? "

" She used to be in a shop, an art shop. You know, pottery and embroideries. . . . What was it ? What ? Maurice, you remember. Hagen's, yes. A woman, named Rachel Hagen."

" Is he an artist then ? "

" Who ? "

" Your brother."

" Oh, Lord, no ; but he's mixed up with a lot of 'em. God knows why."

" H'm."

She jerked her shoulders and twitched her coat about. " Yes, she's not a bad little creature ; she'd be all right if she didn't pick up echoes of Hugh's style. It spoils her completely."

" H'm."

" Not bad-looking, don't you think ? "

". . . Yes," said Mr Grimball, judiciously. " Very pretty in a dark kind of way. Rather . . . difficult to follow, a bit abrupt at times. What ? "

They went off to look at the car.

It was Eve with her husband in the dicky, when they took their seats ; no one conceived otherwise. They were all evading talk. Miles had to be eaten back ; and this carload depressed uncomfortably soon into the mere matter of reaching home. They ran through a pallid village. As they left it, a fresh wind cut across them and the clouds thickened. They sank deeper ; for a while Mr Grimball chanted in a gusty baritone, ". . . For I and my true love will ne-ver . . .," and failed away into a hum. They wrinkled their faces— " Damnable wind." " M'm ? " " Wind." " Yes." Other cars beat coldly past them towards the London road. Church-bells began to throb up evening out of the slowly wheeling landscape.

Here was Hugh, sulky as a rat in his corner—that she needn't have stirred up every prejudice and suspicion in them like that ; when he had prayed her, besought her, to let this day pass at least. He would have spoken to her, but as his mouth split open, he closed it again ; and new sterility brushed

over him like a fall of dry leaves. Why was the car slowing? Why? There were miles yet to go. They said something about drinks. Drinks! and Grimball shouted, "Only just past opening time," and Irene said, "You don't want a drink. Me? No, I don't, certainly. Let's get home." "Home. Yes, home. . . ." They quickened.

Hugh's soul eddied back, grew quieter—and still—was jerked again into his quivering eyes and nostrils. What now? He looked wildly round. Why slow once more—and strain and heave among the oak-trees where a pub lay back? What *is* it? What?

He saw Mr Grimball open his door, before they'd fully stopped, and skip out and go running behind them towards a side-lane; and since the rest were creeping on to the road, he came, too, though he heard only confused whispers and Maurice moaned several times. He knew enough. He didn't need moans—and Eve swearing to herself—and Irene twisting a white face here and there like a snake and crying suddenly to him, "Your fault. You gave him money."

"Who? Who?"

"Ah . . . drunk as a sow."

They herded clucking towards the side-lane, because they couldn't stop where they were.

Mr Grimball was repeating "You're drunk," and the boilermaker answering, "No, I'm not"; but his face consumed Hugh's landscape with its utter and savage surprise. His eyes were fixed. Had the last two hours been no more than a dream of weariness?

"Yes, you are. You're drunk."

"Tell you I'm not."

"Reeling drunk." A momentary pause fell.

The boilermaker's eyes scooped suddenly about the group. "Christ, the whole blasted lot of you . . ."

"*Will* you stop that filthy language? Will you or must I make you? Y-you were beastly insulting to the ladies an' when my . . . my friend here gives you money, you go and get dead drunk on it. You were half-drunk before. Sots like you are a public danger."

"Me drunk? I've had a pint, no more'n that. You walk twenty miles since seven o'clock an' see how you'd . . ."

Maurice was dabbing at Grimball's arm, and Grimball

bellowing and shifting ; and all the time Eve was whispering fiercely into Hugh's ear.

" Hey ? " he said wildly. " What can I do ? I can't stop them."

Fresh thunder of Grimball, as though the boilermaker would be atomized by it. A silence—is he still here ?

Grimball swallowing and stiff—" A'right then. A'right. If y'won't apologize and go, I'll. . . ." He hurled his hat to the grass and buttoned his coat tighter.

A furnace opened in the boilermaker's face—in his mind. " You want t'fight ? T'fight ? Have you hammered the blasted rivets for ten hours a day ? "

His shoulder was shaken by a blow ; he hurled himself in dumbly. They saw a pair of heavy arms wrap suddenly about Grimball's elbows, and the stones flashed and spluttered. Grimball cried out ; his fists beat, his knee worked up. From the briar hedge the terrier poured in a snarling bundle and, while they all clawed against those swinging bodies, there was a rending of cloth and a new note in Grimball's voice. The whole mass fell apart.

A second's breath and Grimball had caught the dog's ribs with his boot ; it yelped, and Hugh was clinging to one of Grimball's arms with Maurice on the other ; and the boilermaker was ten paces down the lane and facing them—ten paces more and facing them. The terrier coiled with bare teeth about his retreat. " You parasites. . . ."

" You bloody parasites. . . ."

He walked slowly away with head bent.

" . . . Quite all right," said Mr Grimball calmly, and puffed awhile. " I shan't go after him. You can leave me alone." He picked up his hat and brushed it. " I admit everything. Abs'lutely. It was a disgustin' piece of self-indulgence. . . . Have a cigarette ? "

He lit one himself. They were profoundly relieved ; the thought of having to dominate the situation had terrified them all.

" H'h," said Irene, with a weak smile. " It was a little . . rash."

" Rash ? " said he, glancing at his trouser-leg. " It wasn't *rash ;* it was putrid self-indulgence. I'll just have to apologize quietly . . . what ? Hope the car's all right." They were grateful to him ; he had restored their world to them by his

mere accent. Before they reached the car, there was laughter. Something had happened to them, but—"H'h—h'h, h'h—h'h"—what of it? A wasp-sting or thorn in the finger; one is unconcerned; here lies the car and yonder warmth and drinks. "Shall we stop for one now?" "No, not now—not with the torn trouser. Home first." "Home."

The front seat laughed still, as they ran on—at moments almost hysterically; the dicky rode above it like a dreadful voiceless hump. They didn't speak in it; the swift precipitation of all events had to be swallowed and comprehended. What was this that had plunged through their day?—stones they'd seen fly suddenly; blood they'd seen rush into faces—swift precipitation through the day's pallid glass. They stirred uneasily. They couldn't digest it. Hugh lifted his face into the wind; like a dog he agonized. Yes—the world was coming to this now; yes—the struggle of classes was spawned now from corner to corner. No pause, no respite. What was he to do? What *could* he have done?

"What could I have done?"

"What?"

He started quickly. "Did I speak? I was thinking of that scene, that struggle. Where was it possible to interfere? On which side? To help this . . . animal here or how could one take deliberately the other side . . .?"

"What's all this you're saying? What's all this wondering? I simply don't understand."

"Eh?"

"I simply don't understand," she said sluggishly.

"*You* understand the revolt of this . . . boilermaker, and the way it dragged these three here into self-defence."

"Did it?"

"Good God, what else? You know the Masses are stirring."

She was silent awhile, and said, "Still—even then I don't see what the Masses have to do with . . ."

"With what?" he said irritably.

"Oh, I don't know. With taking some action . . . with putting these people in their place . . . with all you might have told 'em at tea or just now in the lane."

His itch leapt into an unendurable worm. He rolled his head from side to side. He suddenly threw his hand out to her knee and gripped it with fury and worked it, so that she almost cried out. "I begged you," he said. "I besought you.

And you have no care or pity. Can't you give me a few moments . . . a few days? Seeing that the problem is as awful as a man can face. I said I'd find a way. I promised it —but *you*, before I've taken a breath, are stripping me in front of 'em at every opportunity; so ill-balanced you can't rest a moment; trying every way . . . sneers and jealousy even. Jealousy, even. Oh . . ."

He fell away to his side and lay brooding. She made no answer. He was apprehensive and longed for her to answer; he began to shiver as the heat left him and the jangle of the car tossed him like a bauble. He didn't speak—how could one weaken now?

## CHAPTER FIVE

NEXT morning, with the sky above roof-tops like soapy water, there was Hugh Brabant running through correspondence in his small office; beyond the door was mutter of typewriters and typists—in here a body normalized quietly upon figures and tables, upon a reference-number or a precise heading or a calendar with the days past struck off in neat red. Figures eternal bracketed his soul. He lit his pipe. A mere bundle of moods—that is all we are; and here, with a 'bus-ride between himself and Evelyn, he had become cold and interpretative; he knew his business.

It was certain, for all that, some bladder of doubt persisted in him, vaguely swollen. He shifted his legs and fell brooding —did it persist? Yes, it did. Yes—and gazing beyond his letters he struggled to identify it. He chafed his cheek; labels are hard to find.

It was not anger with her; it was not even his old pain, jealousy of her. What troubled him was the thought that she, too, would be passing from mood to mood, and that by the evening, when he returned, all yesterday would have vanished like a shadow. He saw her greet him with a laugh; with a laugh she came and was smooth and light-hearted, and his slippers lay warming.

He began to pencil shapes upon his blotting-paper. He knew that, if she greeted him like this, his resolve was bound to weaken; it had happened too many times before. Not only

was he vacillating—not only did he lack a hard core of decision, he could not even go out in search of strength, unless driven to it by pure desperation. He felt it very necessary that she should not greet him with a smile. He was afraid she would forgive him.

She must not forgive him. She must make it impossible for him to do anything but rediscover—by whatever means—those men who had strengthened him with their contagion. He closed his eyes. He sank back and rang his desk-bell.

This wasn't Evelyn's day ; she went into her little kitchen and found Mrs Lamb there. Mrs Lamb was grey and asthmatic and short-sighted—had a flat-key to let herself in daily—was just then peeling the potatoes. She said : " Good morning, Miss."

" Yes. Good morning, Mrs Lamb."

" You're back then, Miss."

" Coffee . . . cheese, pot of strawberry, *so*-da. . . . Yes, back at Waterloo half an hour ago. *So*-da. Is there anything else we want on the grocer's list ? M'm ? " There was nothing. The walls of the low kitchen butted towards her, as she swung a foot on the table's edge—with bright copper and brass and china ; one polished well. " M'm ? "

" I suppose you're sorry enough to be back out of the country, Miss."

" No. Yes, I am in a way ; I'm a liar. It's been smelling wonderful. But I'm not really. A few old smells aren't everything . . . are they ? Now, this morning's . . . Monday, isn't it ? Is the cat all right, Mrs Lamb ? "

" I brought him back this morning."

" Oh. Yes, of course. You brought him back this. . . . Has the butcher been ? "

" Not yet," said Mrs Lamb.

" Not yet. No. Well, then I'll be here when he comes. Dull to-day, isn't it ? " She began sharpening a pencil. " I've brought back some evergreens for you, Mrs Lamb. You'd like that ? Would you ? "

" Ah, well. Ah . . . you *do* like to have your bit of the country, don't you, Miss ? And Mr Brabant does, too. Evergreens and berries and flowers . . ."

" Well, I can get 'em, can't I ? "

" Don't they fade and drop though," said Mrs Lamb,

placidly. " Don't they just fade and drop. I looked in the rooms a moment . . . t't, t't."

" But *I* have to clear 'em away," said Eve, peeping out of an eye-corner, " so it's up to me. Yes, I do like leaves. D'you want some ? "

" They do brighten a room up," said Mrs Lamb, peeling on. " And you were born in the country, weren't you, Miss ? "

" M'm ? "

" You were . . . h'm, h'm . . . country-born, as the saying is, Miss ? "

" Yes."

" And Mr Brabant, too, I expect."

" Yes. No. No, he was born in Richmond. When I've dusted, I'll make a cake this morning. And I'll make a pie, too ; we've brought some apples back." She dropped off the table. " Well, now . . . yes," and went off with the dusters, feeling a little lofty with the old woman ; she seemed to look at Hugh and her as though they were almost in a rapid decline—too delicate to be really trusted with life—probably thought of them as " poor dears," *and* talked about them that way. Stupid old girl . . . because Eve privately imagined herself as rather contemptuous of people and animals that took life as it came, placidly and sententiously ; they were to be envied, but they were not quite human. They didn't see life clearly.

She began to sweep with great precision. Yes, there were a crowd of berries and petals down—and dust does accumulate. This was their flat—top one of a block not far from the river, and not high-rented, where the notes of Big Ben floated in easily, on a good wind, like leaves ; it felt transitory, though neither of them saw that—so far at least ; there was plenty there, but light and fickle. Comfortable chairs, of course, and bed and her things in the kitchen almost superabundant—the rest all airy, such as woven mats, scraps of embroidery and feather-work, those painted wood bowls and vases that Rachel Hagen sells, Chinese prints and a flood of water-colour and crayon sketches and a few etchings—mostly good work—usually posted flat up with drawing-pins, and, unifying the whole in every room, flowers and evergreen branches ; they kept books, but not many and these were scattered. They had nothing of a library. This was the shadowing forth of their two instincts for impermanence ; it felt like a flat that expects

the dissolution of all such flats. She didn't see this now ; but it made her itch vaguely ; a host of berries had dropped. She swept them up and tossed them out of the window, began to pick off dead leaves and then found herself drifted again into the kitchen.

" You all right, Mrs Lamb ? Dull to-day, isn't it ? No, no, I don't want the table yet. No. . . . Gets dusty in a week-end, doesn't it ? White, gritty dust, even high up as this. Strange . . . but, of course, *I* don't mind it at all. The dust is there to be got rid of anyway. Do you find it worries you ? "

" Ah . . . I suppose you do," said Mrs Lamb, polishing silver.

" Do *what ?* "

" Find all this dust a bit trying, Miss. I wish you'd let me do the sweeping sometimes."

" But it doesn't worry *me ;* I asked if it worried *you*."

" Me ? " said Mrs Lamb, gazing through spectacles. " No. Not me. Where'd I be if I spent my time worrying about dust ? Dust ? . . . if that was the only hardship, you wouldn't find *me* grumbling, thank you."

" M'm," said Eve ; she flapped her duster decidedly, and ran back into the drawing-room. The yellow cat was sleeping on a chair. He stretched. " Hullo, son," she said, rapidly moving ornaments, " are you glad to see me ? Are you then ? "

He followed her, coiling about her ankles and patting at the leaves that fell. She was scornful with him. " Oh, Lord," said she, " you're useful, aren't you ? Why can't you pick them up ? And I s'pose you've dozens of little kittens by this time up these back alleys—and all as useless as yourself. You old lecher. Lucky for you to have a human being to keep the world tidy for you—you and your floods of offspring. Go on with you."

By midday the rooms were so neat and volatile, that she began to yawn over them. Her nerves were all tingling. The sensuous cruelty, stirred in her over the week-end, was loose and flapping—its fretful rags never dropped to rest, even for a moment. She brooded ; she was thirsty. An instinct drew her at last across the river to Rachel Hagen's ; here maybe one would find some food for this outrageous appetite. People had a way of calling casually at Rachel's ; it was conflict of souls she wanted. As for those Brabants—they could wait ;

her chance would soon come, and, when it came, let them look out for themselves.

She arrived. The side street was dark and obscure ; within the shop, sombre and carelessly arranged, sprang colours like a maze of runnels—small furniture for the most part, and cushions and bowls, trays and a few lamp-shade and curtain designs. They were so saturated, that the dew seemed to lie hot upon them. Eve walked about on the grey carpet, purring in her throat like a large cat, and heavy with the steaming colours. The attendant knew her.

" *She* in ? "

" Aha . . . in the office."

A minute or two more and Rachel herself slid out, indolent and big-breasted in close dull saffron, spread features and brown shining hair. She was surprised. " Hul-lo, my love. I didn't know. How long have you been . . . h'h ? "

" No time at all, my dear." She gazed drowsily at her. " Colours," she said. " I forget how pleasant colours can be, when I haven't dropped in here for a while."

" H'h. Yes. I comprehend you do ; ah . . . a moment, love ; you'll excuse me." The Jewess smiled—ran off to point and instruct—lounged back to finger Eve's hand. " Yes. Yes. And Hughie ? How is he ? "

" Oh, he's quite well."

" Ye-es ? And you ? "

" Yes. There's something that strikes me about this shop, Rachel. See, you're lucky. I don't think I really appreciated it when I was working here . . . it's having this mass of deep pouring colours always round you. Terribly satisfying. Don't you feel you'd go all shrunken and starved if you left 'em now ? M'm ? "

" H'h. It's one way. It's . . . one . . . way certainly. Oh, yes, I agree. Crea-tures like you and me *must* have heaps and heaps and more heaps of . . . something or other. What, I don't know. Who does ? Colour maybe—it can't be always food and drink, and always taking on men. They must be—oh, well !—in accordance with the demand. Of course. But I ? I know how much I want of them all, and there I sit up and find my body still waiting. Colour ? Maybe."

" Oh, maybe. But then one can't be piling up colours indefinitely. They're like moisture ; one has to let them slide

through one's fingers. That's your way, of course ; it's the only sane way—to keep a shop of this kind." She sighed.

" H'h. Ye-es. You *are* clever, my love. We're both of us, you see—eh ? What is it ?—peasant-like and Oriental in our instincts, our demands ? eh ? We want colours and so forth," said she, lazily shifting a bowl or two, " to be oi-ly and satis-fying. H'h."

" M'm . . .," said Eve.

" You've been away, my dear ? " asked the Jewess.

" Away ? Yes, for the week-end. To Hugh's people."

" I've seen . . . the sister ? eh ? "

" Have you ? " said Eve. " In the Café once, wasn't it ? They're an irritating lot." She wriggled her shoulders. " *Petty* emotions, no strong and obscene likes and dislikes of any kind. Except Hugh," she said, looking mildly into Rachel's eyes. " He's all right, of course. I don't mean Hugh."

" H'h. So they fatigued you ? Life is such ; well . . . coming in ? There's one or two there."

" Who ? "

" Oh, men, you see," said Rachel. " Men."

" Who ? "

" You don't know them. I think you don't. It's no matter." The women blinked at each other with sleepy eyelids, allowing for this or that reticence—waywardness perhaps—with an inclination of supple necks and shoulders. They understood. If Rachel sometimes guarded names, or if Eve wouldn't confide feelings about marriage—what of it ? " Coming ? " said Rachel, and swam off in front with twinkling white silk stockings through chairs orange and sea-green and cherry-red. In the office two men sat, both young, and in clothes like dark spiders, arguing fluidly, waving words in the manner of tentacles. Every one nodded ; no one asked for names. They argued on. The women gazed down at them awhile, lighting cigarettes.

" Well . . .," said one, short and round-faced, " to change the subject. I think so. What ? No chairs ? no chairs ? "

" One," said Eve, and took it ; and :

" Me ? " said Rachel. " Keep sitting ; I don't want a chair ; " and she swept aside papers and perched upon her desk. " My love, I should have asked you ; you have painted some bowls for me ? "

" A few," said Eve, pushing a parcel across. The walls were pale yellow ; a pigeon flew by the window ; the men's eyes came out inquisitively.

" Pots," cried the other man, who had a long nose and long fingers. " I knew it, I believe. I adore *pots*. Please let me see. I can see, can't I ? " said he towards Eve. " I shall be so upset if I. . . . Yes, yes, I knew I could. Come along, Rachel." Eve watched carelessly. Pots were taken. " Yes. Not bad."

" Not bad," cried the small man. " Jolly good, you mean. Oh, I say, fishes and shells, and . . . oh, I say, octopus. That makes a jolly significant design. Let's see. Indeed, yes, this is a fair and fine octopus. You know . . . you know I've always said that for designs of this nature one ought to go to the reptile-house and the aquarium. Listen now."

" And a *red* one," said the long-fingered man, striking him on the knee. " Bloody blood-red. That's the colour. I suppose you're a Bolshevik ? Don't say she's not a Bolshevik, Rachel ; if she isn't, don't let me hear it."

" Why ? " said Eve, attentive, suddenly through a glaze of distraction.

" Oh, but you are, aren't you ? "

" Yes, I s'pose so. Yes, I am."

" Of course," said he, rubbing his tenuous fingers together. " I've come to the conclusion we need a fresh vitality in Art, and you've got to have an impetus for that. Revolution's the thing." He was rolling the pot violently to and fro in his palms. " What I say is—release the creative forces in the people to respond to Art. It's too dreadful otherwise. And the forces dormant in the country-side . . ."

" What country-side ? " said Eve, suddenly.

They raised their eyebrows at her. " My dear girl, what ? "

" What ? " murmured the small man. " Haven't you heard of it ? Seed-pods and harvest-fields, and gravid great kine tended by tall fellows with their cudgels ? Yes ? " He smiled encouragement.

" Country-side," cried the other. " This country-side we heard so much about. What ? "

It was conflict she wanted. She frowned at them. Country-side ? Who should know more than she did about those creatures of the country-side ? But even as she moved her lips, a lassitude fell over her ; and so she shrugged. It was not

worth while. "Maybe," said she. "Have it your own way," and she suffered her eyelids to close upon them; her head shifted imperceptibly; she was gazing through the window at a pair of fluttering sparrows.

There was a pause; and then the small man had drawled richly into something fresh; and the other kept glancing at her apprehensively. She saw that. She saw the little clock on the desk and remembered that Hugh would soon be home now. She thought of Hugh.

Well—what? How troublesome it was. How troublesome he was, blaming it all on her and being so ineptly jealous. What? But one couldn't go on quarrelling with him—not with Hugh. It made life impossible; and after all he was Hugh. He was after all—Hugh.

They were chattering about one of the Clubs. The Pantaloon was it? She didn't know. Well—what? She couldn't have jealousies, and he knew it. He knew it well enough. Because you never can tell what you might want to do to make this bore of being human a little more endurable—flirtations perhaps, or even further. Rachel was asking her if she'd have tea here. "Yes. Yes, I will, thank you." Rachel was examining her out of the corner of her lids.

The eyes of the long-fingered one were insanely fascinated by her; he couldn't keep them off her. But she didn't care for him. These little pots were hers—and bright and full of colour; only they were weak comfort; one felt thirsty . . . She drank a cup of tea. When tea was over, and she had slipped away and taken the 'bus home, there was still no decision about Hugh. She sat and waited. She felt by now that it was really all too troublesome, and he would have to arrive in one mood or another, and let what might happen happen.

When Hugh came in, she saw his face. She said nothing, waiting in an abstraction for the first thunder-drops. He rubbed his palms together, pretended to warm them at the fire, and turned round on her. "You've got to start off with an apology . . ."

"Apology? Me apologize? What the devil for?" She hadn't expected this; her skin began to creep—but she laid her book beside her on the sofa. "Do you mind telling me what you want an apology for?"

"Because I've got to live with you, and I . . . I can't,

unless you clear away some of the pain you threw up between us in the week-end."

"You talk as if you were about five years old," she said, swallowing angrily; "and I'm not your sister *or* your mother. Live with me, indeed? You're not a helpless kitten, are you? I can just imagine you talking like that to Irene when you were babies."

He stamped down his foot suddenly. "Don't chatter so much and so fast. When you get excited, you almost trip yourself up sometimes."

She burst out laughing. "You're too ridiculous. I don't believe you're furious at all, you know. I want to throw this book at you. You look so dignified there on the hearthrug. We're acting . . . we're both of us acting. Don't you feel it? If you stop a moment and count twenty, you'll say—'Eve, darling, I'm sorry I was such a baby just now, and I also realize you were quite right yesterday . . .' Hugh, *don't!*"

He took a pace forward and shook her violently by her shoulders; he had often longed to do that. She was so powerless for a moment. "You are noisy . . . noisy," he said, his whole body quivering. "You just suck at me and suck at me . . ."

She pushed him away. "Hugh! it hurts. You think you're so strong;" and she turned without the least difficulty into a phase of tears, mopping her cheeks now and then with a handkerchief. He stepped back to the hearthrug with a sense of awful chasms crossed; he had done it—he would do it again in a moment, if it came to that. His body was still shaking.

"You deserve it," he panted. The yellow cat came out suddenly from a corner chair and twined itself round his legs. Her tears meant so little that she almost threw herself back and laughed at them; the cat thought he was quite tame; but she remembered in time how angry she was.

"You're mad," she cried loudly, sobbing all the time. "Oo-oo, you . . . you haven't really got the guts of a woodlouse. All that gabble of yours . . . about revolts and oppressions, it doesn't mean anything. You're an oppressor if anyone is. If the cat knew what a mean beast you were, it wouldn't trust itself near you." He took up the cat by its neck and dropped it on a chair; he hated this living, insistent contact. "That's right," she said, "I knew you would. Why don't you shake it, too?"

" Good God, woman," he said, stamping, " don't talk so loud. D'you want *her* to hear it all. This is only a small flat ; you're not in the open fields now."

" Oh, and how very progressive you are ! You're just like your family. I can imagine your mother talking like that. ' D'you want *her* to hear ? ' Oh, yes, it would lower our dignity," but she was quieter ; and the weight of that alien and self-sufficient presence—that unfathomable thing who was making dumplings—settled on them both.

" Did *I* insist on a servant . . .," he began.

" I like that. D'you think I want her ? It's you who're quite incapable of taking care of yourself. You can't have it both ways. First, you jibe at me for being a country girl, and then you pretend I'm a sort of luxurious prostitute. . . . You have got a shocking mind, Hugh. I never knew a man who played at life as you do ; you're as dependent as a baby."

" I'm not. Wasn't I in the army, in the ranks ? Doesn't that count for anything ? "

She blasphemed savagely at the whole army. " What was it ? You might get killed—that's all. Nobody's afraid of that. You knew you'd come back to soft beds and drinks and gardens when the War was over. Not like the poor wretches that get chucked on the streets and into slums and have to go back as labourers on the land. . . . The War ? I like that. I don't believe you've any conception . . ."

" Oh, for Christ's sake," he cried, shifting from one leg to the other. " How you talk. It's impossible. There can't be sanity while you refuse to discuss the simplest problem. I . . . I don't know what to do. This cat, what the hell's the matter with it to-night ? It's all round me."

" You can't blame me for that, too. Why don't you ? Say I told it to, before you came in."

" Look here, we can't possibly. . . ." He lurched suddenly forward to the door ; there was a yell. " My God ! you blasted beast . . ."

" Leave it alone, Hugh ! "

" It almost tripped me." He lifted it by the scruff of its neck. " Oh, take it then." He threw it into her lap. " Did you think I was going to beat out its brains against the wall ? I haven't the guts." He hurried out of the room.

The shock of the cat's yell was still in the atmosphere, keeping her breathless and stiff ; there was a pain round her

heart. She was defensive against a stream of hands and feet that lifted at her out of nothingness. The front door slammed ; he had gone. Crying again with fresh warm and medicinal tears, she followed the cat that ran from her knees into a corner. She fumbled for it, bruising her blinded hands against a table-leg. " What has he done to you, *then?* Oh, come here . . . cruel. Is it your paw ? Let me see, then."

There was little harm. The yellow cat, beginning to purr almost immediately, was a most inadequate object of sympathy. He seemed to think the world had never slipped sideways with a coarse malevolence. Eve stroked him—frowned awhile and stroked him further.

It had all passed so quickly. She had scarcely breathed once since Hugh came in ; and here she was, with a situation of startling newness. Her mouth turned down a little ; she felt that something had been snatched out of her hands just as she was getting a grip on it. The morning's loneliness returned with fresh incision. Stupor left her, and she said : " Perfectly horrible. Well, if he runs off, it's his look out. I shan't let it worry me."

## CHAPTER SIX

WHEN he crept in at half-past two, she was asleep in bed ; she did not wake up. He undressed in the bathroom and, lying down cautiously beside her, felt his head throbbing against the pillow ; he did not dare to move it.

To dress together next morning and have breakfast after it, were like moving in a chamber congested with one's own breath. They both suffered under it, with tired eyelids and sticky lips ; they took it for a task to be ground through, as if inhaling suddenly could only mean a lungful of dull, sickening gas. They said a few words politely, as one might be polite to a gaoler—" Excuse me."—" I think you left your shoes under the bed."—" Will you give me another slice of bread, please." It was the simplest way. It was orderly. They thanked heaven for it and drank coolness from one another. Anxious to fling himself into the outer atmosphere, he hurried his coat on ; and the moment came when, if she had seemed

in one pose desolate or uncared-for, he would have been forced to say " I . . . hope you didn't mind me going out." Her movements were quite complacent. The truce between them held as though it were rehearsed. There was nothing to be said.

He made a kind of bow, holding his hat. " Well, I must be off. I shall be in late again to-night, if it doesn't disturb you. If I can get anything for you . . .? "

" No, thanks very much, no. It looks a little foggy to-day. Wrap up well. So long."

" So long."

It was only after three days of this that the flow in of new memories had swelled so high, as to make him look at himself. Up to then he had seemed to suspend breathing ; that was mere pretence—twenty recollections shouldering through his brain forced him to see that life was going on. While they were together, neither of them admitted the other to be more than a fated appendage—merely that. As for separating, it hadn't even come into their minds. They took it for granted that this sort of cohabitation was to persist—till something quite unformulated, quite extraneous, should end it. She was still up when he came in after twelve on the third evening ; she'd been out somewhere and still had her hat on. He had never thought of this ; it was like a bruise across the whole atmosphere of their relation. He expected her to be always asleep in bed.

" I've made a pot of tea," she said smoothly. " Will you have a cup, too ? "

" Thank you ; I'd appreciate it very much." Where had she been ? What did it matter to him where she'd been ? It wasn't *his* concern. The cup was brought, filled, set gently at his side. He caught himself wondering—has she merely put on her hat to make me curious ? To pretend she's been out ? He sat up shocked at his own childishness. She had a perfect right, of course.

In spite of that, the bruise across his life grew persistent and awkward. He worried at it and subdued it, but it remained. Two more days passed. It became imperative. He couldn't ignore the plain fact that Eve was flowing into thoughts and new experiences, and that he knew nothing of them. He became unbearably inquisitive. He could ask nothing. All their co-existence seemed suddenly to have

hardened into a shell-like formation, sacred and impervious ; he longed for an earthquake to shatter it up, he was helpless. His mind divided itself—one part drinking in nutriment from his own solitary search, the other feverishly conjecturing upon every thought and every decision of hers. Was she angry ? Was she planning ? Did she meet . . . whom ? Could he ask ? Or should he follow ?

In the daytime, while he worked or sat in 'buses, the chance encounters of his night-life would pour suddenly into his mind like exhalations ; they were without depth or strength ; he only knew they had happened. He struggled all the while to give them body, but they remained mere vapours. He despaired. There were so many of them, but in none was the essential intoxication that he had hoped for ; out of none of them did he arise utterly transformed. They came from an abode of the dead. It was only after a week that he accustomed himself to them and felt them knitting into his muscular sensations, convulsive in his digestion, and rising and falling with his breath.

Streets after streets after streets—he lost himself in them by night again and again—the habitation of creatures whose thoughts were untouchable. He had been taught that they were untouchable because non-existent. Now, he had torn the veil aside, and they were there before him. He walked on ; he could not dare to pause. He made the thousand faces he met into cold walls, their eyes into twisting screws that turned him carelessly aside like an obstruction ; he fancied them wonder "Why does he parade like this through alleys that have nothing to do with him ;" at moments he felt hunted.

They took a little form—each group of tangled streets isolated from the next by a river of thoroughfare ; and on these thoroughfares his spirit would debouch and spread and suspire and he would cross them and again disappear. He stopped to look in shop-windows as an excuse for stopping ; constant motion was nullity. He must delay—he must possess.

Darkness crept through these avenues like a gradual pervasion of dust-storm, infinite particles gently gathering about the eyes. One looked up suddenly at the sky, stretched tight from roof to roof ; and it was grey. Sometimes an unseen conflagration cast its luminance into universal space ; the small clouds became shreds of lighted paper ; there was a beauty—inexpressibly remote, in which one almost breathed

the odour of blazing pine-forests and heather-land—a vegetative earth in flames ; one knew the sun had set.

Already there was gas, in a shop and a room—then along a whole street. There was quiet ; there were teas. Men coming singly and in groups dispersed and vanished. Hundreds of children, scuttling everywhere like ground-birds, filled the narrow spaces with their craving vitality ; the back streets went up in thin, hoarse cries and snatches of unbridled song ; they flung themselves across him and against him. Still almost incoherent, they accepted the life that must be theirs—a life of unbroken throated publicity, numberless encounters—life electronic. They scarcely knew the meaning of isolation.

He saw all-but-babies, who were mothers to the even younger brood, mothers in tone and thought and gesture—everything except the mere bodily automatism. The turbulence of new birth rose and rose till it was deadening ; utterly confined, they insisted ; they were indestructible. There were some playing with a small heap of sand left by the roadmen. He watched them for a moment. There are deserts of sand in the world. On that spot, where soil is invisible, they paddled, heaped and carried to and fro the almost computable grains. How could they do so much with so little ? He felt as though he had seen them, from very infancy, beginning to make bricks without straw, pyramids without levers—perhaps a world out of nothing but despair.

It grew dark. He was forced to rest, and ate in small coffee-shops and restaurants, silently masticating and always a ghost —never part of the place. He began to long for company then. As the narrow streets lost colour, they turned more and more into structures of smell ; he was sensitized acutely. He distinguished drains that he had thought impossible in their sudden foulness—the smell of old bricks, dust and horse-dung, —the oily stench of a fish-shop passing into the mouldiness and damp breath of rotting woodwork that poured from house-doors—and the vast floury smell of warehouses and the smell of beer sloppings in public bars. They ordered themselves uncleanly about him, a wealth of putrescence and neglect—the sensuous ever-present wealth of the proletariat.

There was a small man leaning alone at an alley corner, who said, " Can you lend us a match, mate ? " Hugh turned gratefully ; but it was a sad interview. He distinguished a thin boy with cold fingers ; the boy saw his clothes and heard

his accent. " Thank you, sir. Much obliged ; " he lit his cigarette. His " sir " had no sudden meanness or deference in it ; it just dropped a veil subtly and for ever between them. It refused intrusion.

" Not at all. Would you like to take a few ? "

" Thank you, sir ; " he was not surprised ; he took a dozen or more and emptied them into his own box.

" Getting cold at nights now. Many unemployed round here ? "

" Yes . . . yes . . . I s'pose there are," and after that, through the conversation, he looked first one way and then the other with his shoulders hunched ; he was looking for answers and quietly demanding escape.

" It must be damnable. The Guardians make themselves unpleasant, don't they ? "

" Well, sir . . . of course, some don't like going to 'em, and some don't complain much about it."

" I suppose the Labour Government helped things a little."

" I s'pose it did, sir. Don't know that any of 'em makes much difference to the likes of us people. They're all the same, *I* think." He spat ; it was the sign of dismissal.

" Well . . . good night."

" Good night, sir. Thank you." He remained leaning, a bitter mask beyond hope of saviours.

In a street after midnight Hugh saw a fire. A banner of flame leaped bubbling from an upper window and seemed to strike the opposite house and to rebound. He ran back. It was a celluloid store, he heard, a number of films. The street woke in an instant ; children, crying like wildfowl, fled from every door ; windows rattled up as if caught by a gust. It seemed a few seconds and the street, sprouting with wrapped shapes and countless shawls, was ploughed through by the vast engine. It tolled round the corner—it tolled into a wave of scattering humanity. Another followed it and then another. He heard the splinter of woodwork, and in the crowd he ducked and pressed and was pressed remorselessly back on to pavements. He felt the arms of helmeted men thrusting them aside like twigs, brushing them out of the way.

He didn't care. No one cared. The water began to hiss and the roadway flowed under the wheels. He stood silent awhile in the continual chattering, the ordered shouts and that unceasing palpitation of the great monsters—four or five

of them now—stretching away into the darkness. He saw that he might speak with all men—that all life had become a show—and barriers were down in the drunkenness of the drama ; he asked and described and even laughed with them ; it was glorious. It was an entertainment, an invasion of licensed demigods tearing the elements apart—nothing of greater concern than that. They reduced all things to a common level ; and for a while all things knew it. Clay and stone, fire and water —what was there else ? Nothing else until they had gone, leaving a stench of oil and char and the roadway puddled, and the air meaningless. Crowds faltered, began to thin away.

He gazed painfully at them, and saw recognition dawning in their eyes ; the Saturnalia was over. The street became a mask, shaking off this creature that was alien to its close rooms and comfortless beds. Life was no longer a show ; and a dual presence, vast and unsmiling, detached itself from the shadows and perambulated slowly down the centre of the road ; two left feet fell abreast—two right feet. " Come along now." " Move along now, please." " Come on, mother, take 'em up now." They had been there all the time ; the demigods retired, the true gods rose like cold machines into their place. Damply and ponderously, with one wave of a hand, they had re-established the iron law of wages—the sacredness of property—the words " thou shalt." There was no start of surprise. The proletariat knows all ; it had hidden itself.

These were his thoughts and memories, and few of them had any strength. He recalled interviews that seemed to him like the communion of two ghosts. He would wander on every night into a fresh ganglion of streets. He rarely recognized them again ; he was not sure of any of them—though in the end he must have travelled them twenty times.

One walked an alien world. Suspicion clothed their minds, —or, if not suspicion, then a humility that was still more impenetrable. Some would draw aside for him to pass, meekly direct him on his way ; but is not meekness the very sister of resentment ?—And did they withdraw themselves in case they should pollute him, or in case he should pollute them ? One could not tell.

In the daytime he grew peevish and broke his fountain-pen, imagining they all knew what he wanted and frustrated him on purpose. That made him carnivorous—till he left the office ; then the hunger went out of his teeth and, by the time

he was off his 'bus, his intestines were limp, and he had to stiffen them with a whisky.

Drinking it, he had a sudden vision—that he in his frustration would go mad, grip horribly at something with mouth and fingers, shriek, be hauled off to a police-station. These upper classes—ho, my ! Infusion was what *he* wanted—blood that beat. This thin stuff he had to endure only made all the skin tickle, like bugs walking over him.

Along cobbled streets that he already knew ; the children sent them up in deafening cries ; another conflagration in the West ; carts bouncing from cobble to cobble sprung a hundred lathes flicking against his ears, as if from a rotatory cog-wheel. In saloon bars, he thought, there is human intermixture ; if not blood, then at least beer. It is a proletarian swig, damn it, it is. What a bourgeois soul, but how infinitely necessary was it that he should be given the strength of all the ages, past and future ; and the past was only dust and had no solution, and the future repulsed him when he came towards it ; what a malevolent fate.

He went into another bar and then another, and was only a customer, and made dignified exits, until a half-inebriated man in a grey homburg turned on him.

" What do you think of it, sir ? Here. Here's somebody who'll inform you. Here's a man of the world . . ." He drew him by the lapel into his discourse. He had a brown wrinkled face, dark eyes, mobile lips. He sibilated thickly, but not through drink alone—rather by an uncertain management of all his features. " This gentleman . . ." He lapelled an amazingly large and overwhelming shape that appeared to lurch over them. " This gentleman . . . I'm afraid I cannot introduce you, because I do not know your names. . . ." He winked covertly at Hugh and as covertly at the other. " *This* gentleman tells me he was a member of the Force ; he tells me with the force expected from the Force that he was dismissed for striking. Now, am I not right, sir, in saying that the general public sympathizes with police strikers ? "

" Now look here," growled the large man, " I'm glad to have a word with you. You say you're gentlemen of the general public . . ."

" Now—now, just a moment, my dear sir. Let our mutual friend here have time to convince you." He winked again at Hugh. " First, let's have another. Florrie, my dear . . ."

The veils were down ; and suddenly, at once, there was a pulsation in Hugh's throat ; he took a gulp. " I . . . I think so. Yes, certainly. I think they all have a right to form a Union, if they want to."

He was glared at quickly, and the homburg twisted like a bird's head. " There you see, my dear fellow. He agrees without any qualification. Have your drink. This is yours. . . ." He turned to Hugh. " *You* don't know how to *do* it. You want to *draw* him . . . we journalists have to *draw* them. Yes . . . yes. Why, if I were a copper, I'd strike and strike and strike again, if they wouldn't consider me. I would. Why, look at the work—up at all hours of the night. Dan-gerous work, too. Why, look at these race-gangs, and then the revolver fights, and . . . oh, no, no, no." He shook his head into a glass of whisky and drank half of it.

" Now let me ask you," persisted the vast man in a voice like a battering-ram. " If that's the case, why did all the blasted newspapers . . now you can't deny it ; you can't look me in the eyes and deny it . . . why did they all black us when we came out the last time ? That is what you've got to answer to."

" Again I refer you to our friend here. He'll answer it. If I were to tell you his name, you'd be staggered."

There was nothing but cold, hideous laughter.

" No, it's you I'm asking," said the police-striker, with a large forefinger, " and I want an answer."

" Trade Unions are fine things . . . wonderful things," said the journalist, waving his glass. " Ah, when I think of all you fellows after the toil of the day meeting in your little back rooms, amid all the difficulties building up your machinery, when the duchesses and the international bankers are having their two guineas' worth at the Savoy . . . it is a marvellous and terrifying phenomenon."

" What trade are you, if I might ask ? "

" A mere artificer in words, sir. A humble chronicler of the times, as Shakespeare says. I earn a guinea here and a guinea there."

" He means he's a journalist," said the desperate and angry Hugh. " He writes in the newspapers."

" Oh, you do, do you ? I *thought* you might be one of that feather. Now, I want to ask you . . .," and soon afterwards Hugh left them. He felt a malignant envy against a creature

that could talk like this. How did he *do* it ?—and at the same time why didn't the big man hit him in the face ? What restrained him ? What patience—or stupidity ?

The drink blurred his forehead and he paced along slowly. To wrench the secret from behind that irony or patience or stupidity. There was no order and no voice in it all. Only more children playing hop-scotch—carts still grinding over the cobbles—a lounging man or two—and then the shameless burst-out of barrel-organ—Ting-tong-y-tong-tong . . . tralalalalaleeeeee. He hurried past it.

He was driven on from corner to corner. The voice of the journalist woke up in his ears—" Trades' Unions . . . building up your machinery . . . two guineas worth at the Savoy," till he paid attention to it, handling it as though it were a reptile. He saw the picture ; he stood suddenly frustrated and eaten with loathsome jealousy at ten thousand closed doors. They were barred ; he looked at the very doors about him, knowing there would be no mark upon them. Behind, the day's slavery finished, they sat in rows of tired fetid bodies and said phrases he could not guess and planned matter he could not know. They were on their own business now—the platoons of darkness wearily drilling their patient thoughts from shape to shape. His brain heard nothing but a growl—distinguished nothing but bodies and grey smoke. He could never enter there.

It was the eighth evening now. Vision after vision had been photographed upon his retina and passed down into the insatiable mind behind it ; they kept rising like films, first one then another. Could he not forget ? They were thinner than films, two-dimensional and numberless. He had thought that number was strength a few days back. On a little viaduct he stopped alone and leaned over the parapet. The street below ran down almost headlong and twisted suddenly. He saw that it was cobbled and broken. Leaning there, insulated for a moment in this completely alien world, he felt the cold mist and the cold stonework and thought with numbing clarity of his wife ; there was a spasm like a flood of freezing water, followed by heat, wherein his temples tightened violently, and he almost vomited his two pints of beer over the parapet.

His wife—Evelyn. He standing here—that is to say, this inane figure—was married, and for more than a week had been behaving as though he were mad. *He* knew why he was

doing this ; yes, but *she* didn't. There was no obliging suspension of time and intercourse while he worked out his own salvation. On the third day he had realized this, on the fourth, on the fifth ; now it was the eighth. Nothing had happened to him, nothing. Not a footstep came down the street to pulse out the passage of time ; but he counted his sick and noisy breaths and thought with each ten—*she* has done something now, *she* has spoken another sentence—and to whom ? All his jealousy, accumulated within the last half-hour, fell groaning and agonizing upon this new image. He must find out.

Oh, you cold and empty streets, are there a hundred eyes behind the shutters laughing at me ? Oh, must I go back after all ? Suppose he threw himself over the viaduct and broke his leg, would not some doors have to open and draw him in ? He wondered if it was hopelessness of this kind that made a man suddenly find he had shot his wife dead—wake up, as it were, with the explosion of the cartridge. He shuddered at the idea and walked hurriedly away, as though he left it upon the little viaduct.

He crawled home at midnight like a cripple. The flat was empty and he had no surprise. He expected it. In the glass he looked like a man who has been drinking—and he felt like it, and he had been drinking. He washed himself and pushed restlessly from room to room. This was his house—and he was moving about in it like a small kernel in a comfortless shell. He grew sick with its screaming impermanence, because that impermanence was only the exudation from himself ; and what he had once approved, he suddenly loathed. It was his own image again embracing him out of a mirror—sapless, weak, indeterminate.

He lit a gas-fire and it seemed to have no warmth. Yet he himself had decided that they should have gas-fires. He sat feeling—" Am I a solitary phenomenon, a historic sport ? Surely I can think of many in my class who live something like this . . . a little more or a little less. As if in tents, ready at a moment to fade away into the desert. Are they happy ? do they instinctively, too, know themselves as the thin end of a degenerated stream ? Is that why we shrink from children ? " and first he envied the lives of such as his sister, because of their blindness ; and then with a dreadful hunger brooded upon those masses of small streets.

A thousand shapes of workers pressed before him, women, children and men; *he* knew they were clothed in uncertainty —accident and unemployment, ejections, victimizations and decay. Nothing could conceal it; and yet he saw—how was it?—only some unfathomable certainty in them, more than endurance, though it carried in it all we mean by endurance —more than patience—more than vitality. They grew, ate, cohabited and begot and lived, not in spite of these things, as did he and his hesitating kind, but because of them. That was the miracle. All the time bricks without straw, pyramids without levers. Their very bones, lungs and genitals seemed assured that they were inevitable, the very raw matter of creation, civilization, humanity itself. He stood up, shaking all over like scum upon a bottomless lake—scum shaken by an insignificant breeze.

She came in, and he gazed at her with a brooding curiosity, as though she were no more than the yellow cat; he dared not be anything but numbed.

She broke this up. Quite naturally and half-amused she said: "Oh? You're in first this time, then?"

He turned cold. Good God! was it all so normal now? He hadn't realized. He swallowed. "Aren't you wondering—aren't you inquisitive about . . .?"

"What?"

"About my reasons for going out like this? Don't you feel it worth understanding?"

"Oh, I don't know. . . ." She took off her hat and threw it into a chair, brushed back her short dark hair and shook it into shape.

He watched the movements. Desperately shying from them, he inverted all his own hunger and poured on. "Tell me, aren't you imagining I've been off with women? Picking up something in the parks? or more than that?"

"Hey?" She was surprised. "No, I didn't imagine that. No, it . . . didn't strike me." Her pause, with head raised thoughtfully, and one arm across her supple body adjusting a shoulder-strap, was simply the all-satiating feminine. She would consider his question; but then what else could he possibly need than herself? She walked to the fire and stood with her knees pressed together, one foot delicately turning, her back to him.

"Are you sure?" said he. "Well, what then . . .?"

" I didn't think you were out with women. It didn't seem to me you had any reason ; " and, while she went on contemplating the strange inquisition, her body was rounding off the answer. Her shoulders moved as she touched her hair again, glanced at herself in the glass, stretched out a hand for no purpose along the mantelpiece and dropped it on her hip ; she bent over to the fire ; the nape of her neck shone smoothly like water—curved like a brown egg. He saw the faint soft shadow where the hair ended. He half-thrust his hands forward and his mouth quivered over her name. Then he was afraid.

" Well," he said desperately, " the fact that . . . the fact that I haven't been off whoring or anything like it doesn't prove. . . . You mustn't take it for granted that life is bound to go on like this. I don't pledge myself to any limitation. I want you to understand that." He was working himself into a savagery. " You must get it quite clear. As for this going out at nights, I'm engaged in something I feel to be necessary . . . I feel it's got to be done."

" Yes, I'm not doubting it," she said in a husky, subdued voice.

" A man may have to do this—anyone may. You know some of my ideas about life. You know it's difficult."

" I s'pose it is."

" We've got to have *some* sort of compromise. It's all too disturbed. We've got to talk."

" I s'pose so," she answered.

" Well . . . what about it ? You're not very communicative." He shifted his legs angrily.

She said nothing. He glared at her back ; and standing upright she touched an ornament or so, straightening them idly. The thought struck him—she feels herself at home ; the fire warms *her* all right ; she can go out enjoying herself somewhere, and quite calmly drop back here to roost—and with me, in spite of everything.

She turned and looking quietly at him said : " Would you like a cup of tea before we go to bed ? I'll put a kettle on."

" Oh . . . oh, you're making a fool of me," he cried. " You're treating me like a child."

" You're *not* going to start it again ? " she said.

" No, *I'm* not. But you . . . you . . ."

" Why the devil don't you say what you want to ? You know you're mad to find out where I've been."

" Then why don't you tell me ? " he said. " Why don't you tell me and have done with it ? Unfair, always unfair. I've told you everything. Naturally you might have guessed ; anyone would have guessed."

" But you haven't," she answered. " You haven't told me a single thing."

" I told you I wasn't after women," he said.

" Oho, so *that's* what you think of me, is it ? Thanks for letting me know. D'you imagine . . . don't talk so much . . . d'you imagine the only thing I worry about in a man is that he shouldn't go after another woman ? "

She stamped her foot. " I wouldn't attempt to keep you. I'm not going to interfere with you, and I don't expect you to interfere with me. What's the use of getting so wild ? You can't have it both ways. No one can."

" What do you mean ? "

" Well, you can't have this new soul-experience of yours *and* my company."

" Your company," said he.

" My . . . attention, then, if you like it. Or my disappearance till you're ready for me again. You want everything."

" No, no," he said. " I want sufferance. If I believed that your experience at the moment was as important to you, as mine is to me. . . . But it can't be, it can't be. You have no weakness or doubt in you comparable to mine. I am uncertain of everything, except that my life should be struggle and revolt ; I am searching for the power to struggle, I tell you—the basis and fountain of struggle ; and how can I find it in a moment ? "

## CHAPTER SEVEN

But next morning, as he walked away towards his 'bus, this declaration felt rather weightless ; he wasn't so convinced that he was necessary. His body was unhappy, like water in a dried and cracking skin ; he had a parchment face with slits for mouth and eyes. The night had been stiff with a renewal

of that staged politeness — that ghastly plaster-of-Paris serenity; and all the stiffer because something had to yield soon, and both of them realized it, and neither of them could endure to be the weaker.

He hurried. Dew shook from the grass in cold front gardens. Thoughts hurried, telling him that if he wasn't very necessary —a trivial young business gent—at least it was the only life *he* could have; and blood rose salt to the head; and he knew quite hopelessly that that night must bring some final consummation—even if he had to search on and on. He couldn't meet her again at midnight or after; to-night must be the end. He would come back to her with something so placid, so frozen and formulated, that from then—with one pressure —he could himself snap their awful suspension of life; he would say "*Now*, what have you been doing? Now, where do we stand with one another?" Either that or no return at all.

He hung in the middle of the afternoon among new thoughts that had crept up with the sloping hours—that he must find out where she went. He would follow her; he couldn't bear another evening. But he loathed himself so much when the picture of it clarified in his mind, that he bit his hand as though it were an offence.

He left his office and hid from himself off a main thoroughfare, walking on and on, turning at random; he did not look at his watch. This was a fresh quarter to him. He needed it fresh; the old avenues had about them the sour breath of old depressions; and yet he knew the people were the same and that only he could change them. Children still flung themselves across him and men came home to tea. He stopped dead in one darkening street saying, "This must be the one . . . no further;" and at once his feet were tugging him forward. How could he stay?

A queer, involuntary fit made him stumble over the children and lurch roughly, into harmless meditative men; it frightened him; it was like magnetism. They were everywhere. "Sorry," they said, or "Hold up, guv'nor." He smelt on them the day's work, coal and leather and lime—and the dye on dusty clothes and drying sweat—and tobacco and decaying teeth—and the puffs of bread and butter from faces peering into his. They became a bed of odours, through which he seemed to flow. He thought they looked at him, and still thinking it he fell

over a seated child. He had no need to fall; he saw it clearly enough—a small girl with curly mouse-coloured hair; but he had to twist round on his ankle and come down with hands and knees half into the gutter, lose his stick and slime the skirts of his coat. It seemed that he must cleave in very loneliness to the mean pavements shuffled by their feet. The child, dumb for a moment with surprise, dropped mouth in a quivering wail; it rose up and up. Coincidently from her playmates a fierce shriek of exultation—ha-ha-ha-he-e-e, deafening and torrential; how were the mighty fallen—the class-war was out; and then a silence like fear, as the elders turned and craned and hurried, and he picked himself up.

The child wasn't hurt, of course; he bent over her. "No-o-o, she's all right," said the woman who had her by the arm. "Now, stop it, can't you? What d'you 'xpect sitting in the way like that?" She shook the arm fiercely. "Ann-ie, d'you hear me speaking to you? Stop it." The crowd was gathering. She looked angrily at it. ". . . making all this fuss. Wait till you get something to *hurt* you. Here, Lizzie, you . . . why can't you look after her, when I told you? I can't do everything . . ."

"I'm very sorry," he said wildly. "I'm very sorry." He didn't straighten his hat; he was vaguely rubbing at his coat.

She was too fatigued to listen. "Yes, it's all right. Here, you, Liz, *will* you come when I call you?"

He pushed a penny down into the baby's hand, agonized at doing it; it was the only way he knew, the bourgeois buying his freedom—let me not have to think of these things. He turned into the crowd, staring at each face despairingly and they gave way. There was a shout. He did not pause, and footsteps trotted after.

"Mister . . . mister, is this your stick?"

"What? Yes. Yes. Yes, it is." They were all watching him. Why was he swaying across the pavement? Was it his knee that hurt? Windows were opening ahead of him; a man looked curiously; two women, running from a doorway, stopped and clicked their tongues, "Tch, tch." The street was suddenly quiet, except for footsteps; they were *his* footsteps. He had become a spectacle, a passage across limbo from his own world and towards it again; that was all—and the inhabitants let him wander on. Then he lurched through sheer consciousness of eyes into the gutter and back again,

and his knee dragged him ; there was a sound behind like innumerable leaves ; they were in motion. He saw a hatless young fellow come round the corner and stand with mouth opening. A woman passed. " Go on." " What, me ? No. . . . What's matter ? " " Go on. He's *hurt* himself." " Is he *drunk?* " questioned an in-butting male. " Hurt himself. . . ." " Oh, *hurt* himself ? " " Knocked his head." " Go *on*, I tell you . . ."

So he was round the corner and a dozen paces down the fresh street ; a hand touched him on the sleeve. " Here, I say, you all right ? " He walked on. " You hurt yourself ? What did you do ? Here, hadn't you better brush your coat ? "

He walked on and stopped abruptly. Two eyes were questioning him. He felt silence everywhere and looked back ; the streetfull had paused and gathered at the corner —no further. They were watching to experience merely, not to interfere. They contemplated without comment ; beyond that corner was their alien world—and their class does not invade except when goaded to possess and hold. Instinctively he moved on as he made his answers :

" No, no, it's quite all right. No, I'm not hurt, thanks. I was a bit . . . dazed. Yes. I slipped over."

" Aren't you limping a bit ? " said the thick, sober voice. " You twisted your leg ? "

" Nothing, nothing. What makes you so interested ? "

" They said you had. It worries 'em. That's all. They all get excited when someone's hurt. You don't object ? "

" What, *I?* I . . . no." He was breathless ; he looked sideways at this fragment from the mass—this mere unsubstantial envoy ; to draw him on, a little farther and a little farther, stretching the tenuous thread behind him till it snapped—somehow to preserve this conversation. " They *are* kind," he suddenly confessed. " Yes, your people are kind. I *have* known it before ; it's sheer decency, really human."

He still felt the serious, clogged stare of the adenoidal boy. " You don't find consideration like that elsewhere ? Yes ? "

" You're right. I'm sure you're right. Are we . . . walking too far ? Will they want you back ? " He moved a few paces forward. " There's a wonderful sense of kindness in your people. Did they think I was drunk ? "

" Ye-es. . . . Huh, huh. Did you know ? "

" No . . . yes. I don't know. I'm still rather dazed.

Don't come further than you want. Won't they be waiting for you to go back ? "

"Noaw," said the boy, contemptuously. "They'll go back home in a mo'. They'll forget all about you and get along to have a drink. You want not to hurt their feelings ? Yes ? " He threw open his coat and plunged his hands into the trousers pockets. Hugh looked again thirstily at the cropped fair hair and ugly almost swollen features, where the mouth opened and twisted itself and the eyes kept that fixed curiosity ; he was noisy in his breathing ; from time to time it was complicated with little gulps and whistles and he blew his nose with gross clamorous assumption. Hugh dissected those last words and felt almost a relief—a shameful and sudden burst of intimacy.

" But what about *you ?* Don't you want to go with them ? You seem to distinguish yourself from them in some way." He furrowed his brows.

" Oh," said the young man hurriedly. " I see you think I'm a bit bourgeois. Yes ? Is that what you're thinking ? P'raps I'm wrong ? You're not looking at it that way at all ? "

" Bourgeois ? . . . bourgeois ? Let me think a moment ; I feel fuddled. I didn't expect you to use that word. Perhaps, though, I did."

" You see, I don't know if you use that word. You make me feel awkward when you talk on like that—you do, really. Y'see . . ." His thoughts began to work rapidly, and his words nosed thickly into one another ; he had to suck at his breath, " . . . you are queer, I don't know where to have you. When you spoke first of all, I imagined . . . oh, never mind. I don't know. That I said just now about going into pubs, it looked as though I despised the folk that did it . . . yes ? I didn't mean that really. They can't help forgetting quick what happens, see ? They have a damn awful time, I know, and then one says to another p'raps, ' What about one ? ' see ? And they just drift off. Aw, damn it, I'm talking in the same way again. You'd say so ? You'd say that was bourgeois . . . yes ? "

" I don't know," said Hugh, feverishly. " I must understand." He moved his head from side to side. The whole utterance and the working, dough-like features affected him as if an embryo were struggling at premature delivery. There

were pangs in it that he felt everywhere among these streets. " Tell me again."

" Oh, it's nothing. No."

" Yes, it is. I'm ignorant; you understand. . . . Don't go along back unless you feel you've got to; but don't let me drag you. Please. You don't know what an insane place the world has been to me. Good God! you don't *wish* to be bourgeois ? " He suddenly began to perspire with suspicions. " What is it you want ? You don't think I'm a typical bourgeois, do you ? D'you imagine I'd think you a bit cultured for knowing the word and talking about *them* ' going to pubs,' and that I'd think you a misunderstood poetical soul ? "

The change was immediate; he saw those thick features settle into a mould of dull impenetrable surliness; the breath whistled; the expression of his eyes passed through shrinking to resentment and finally turned pathetic. " I expect you're right," said the young fellow, in a husky, colourless voice. " You're not hurt ? That's so ? I guess I'd better be moving along now." He cleared his throat noisily.

" No, no. No. I make mistakes. I didn't really mean that I believed you thought you were a bit of an intellect. Only . . . I suspect everything and everybody. Can't you try to understand ? How is it you people haven't any compassion ? You're all as troubled as a bunch of old nurses when you think I've scraped my knee—some absurd trifle of that sort—but you never consider that I have any problem worth asking, any difficulty at all. You're all right. You're a . . . a proletarian."

The word jerked upon a string; it was like a secret signal. " Ha, you know that word ? Yes ? I'm one of the prolies. Say, I didn't know you used that word p'raps. You do ? "

" I ? We ? Oh, *we* don't use it or even realize its existence —except when we're exercising our refined sense of humour —smiling over your quaint jargon. Bourgeois ? We should be disappointed, by the way, to think you pronounced it correctly. You ought to have said ' bushwoys ' or ' boojors,' or something devilishly comic of that sort."

He noticed that half he said seemed to be unheard. The boy's serious body groped forward to a consummation of its own. He cleared his throat again. " Then you—I mean you, yourself—you know by reading books ? Yes ? "

" Not much more than that." They were three streets now from where they had started, by lonely railings about some factory; he stopped and leaned against them; his knee was not tugging now. They had reached this place—by loitering advances and pauses, as though Hugh were moving forward in sheer necessity—had a train to catch. He ceased to pretend. An occasional passer-by, under the street-lamps, kept a face incuriously towards them and went on.

Hugh looked at the young human creature and offered a cigarette. " Don't mind if I do "; and his share was the striking of a match for both of them. He gazed earnestly as he held the match. Imperfection of pose, feature, feeding, health, wrapped him like a foul blanket; he sucked in poisons and could scarcely breathe them out. He was not a culture—not a design and a civilization; but still the organic substance of these things, their fœtus and nothing more. His body and his mind, moulded out of all the waste matter of a decaying epoch, eternally congested themselves and eternally struggled against this congestion. He groped outward for oxygen. Converse with him was to sustain an embryo; he thrust and tore carelessly through the delicate tissue of Hugh's thoughts—that super-elegant and strained essence of gentility.

But again that shameful sense of intimacy worried at Hugh; and he saw abruptly that what he was touching here—what made their contact even possible—was the strange contorted image of himself. He saw it with deep humiliation. They were drawn together by a common suspense of all their powers, a common isolation and uncertainty. They looked on at life. Their private conflicts were merely the inverted forms of one another; wrenched out of type by them, emasculated and declassed, they met in a gloomy purgatory of their own between caste and caste. This boy—he could only unveil the proletariat, only discover it to the frustrated bourgeois by virtue of all that was not proletarian in himself. So it must be, then; so it must be.

" What did you mean," said Hugh, suddenly, " about having the ideas of a bourgeois? Was that your phrase? "

" Oah, ye-es. Oh, I didn't mean much." He frowned convulsively. He was looking into Hugh's eyes. " See, if a chap like me *talks* about prolies in that way, ' *they* ' are so wretched that they have to go into pubs, he must be feeling towards them in that way; you think so? It sounds sort of con-

temptuous and superior—yes? I mean, it looks as though I thought my street rough and wretched, just as you might. You would, wouldn't you? I s'pose you must . . . oh, hell, I can't express."

"But you do. Better than I could."

"See, if I talk like that, I must be wanting to become an intellectual and release myself from the struggles of the proletariat. I'm always doing it. It's the way they teach you." He was pulling at a single finger, twisting his heavy face; and opened his indelicate hands in a vague gesture of weakness.

"Some one been telling you this?"

"Oah, ye-es, they have said so."

"But . . . who?"

He mumbled. "Oh, chaps I meet;" and cleared away the huskiness with great violence and ceased to communicate. There was a silence. If he wearied this precious thing, if he frightened it away, he would lose it. There could be no hope—a sudden "good night," an engulfment, retreating footsteps. He said, "*I* have to go, but I don't want to. I want to talk a little more." Still silence; he felt that only by resigning this fragile handful now—now when it was so priceless—could he dare to cling to it. His mouth was dry and sticky. "Would you . . . care to meet again if I came along this way?"

"Why, sure. I might see you passing. Yes?"

"Well, what about just knowing your name and address?" Hurriedly he yielded up his own; there was no sign that they were accepted. He waited feverishly—"And may I know yours?"

"Oh, ye-es," said the boy, waking up. "You want my name, eh?" He gave it in a rapid, husky voice, and Hugh had to plead for repetition.

"21," he murmured. "21 . . . 21. I'll remember. 21." A minute later they had parted.

He was ecstatic. He whistled loudly as he went along, and in one lonely passage ran a few steps; because it seemed to him the task was over. Number 21—the bursting of that door, only one it was true, screamed in him like a consummation. He was received; he was embraced. He ran his stick violently along area railings and pressed into a lighted thoroughfare. He didn't hurry across it as in the days before; he turned down it and sauntered, looking idly from side to side. The shops would soon be closed; there were some purchasers

with their baskets, many unconcerned passers-by, at intervals a pair of prostitutes, loungers about some window. He was delighted with life. He looked at the prostitutes and smiled benignly at them, because they were morsels of life ; and he did so without qualm. Three or four times during the week he had writhed himself in desolation about the thought of a prostitute ; why not that—and drown his body in it. Now, he was warmed and complacent, and could trust himself to any licence. He received answering smiles—but they soon faded. He did not think of that. He pushed himself cheerfully into a crowd about an animal-fancier's and pondered over the puppies and cats in their cages and the white mice. " That's a fine little hound," he said to the man at his side.

The man after due contemplation removed his pipe. " I know the father o' that brood," and he shook his head.

" No good ? " said Hugh, sadly.

" . . . Not a sticker," said the man.

Hugh went on. Number 21 suddenly seemed a little tenuous ; the farther he progressed, the more tenuous it became. Shops began to close. It occurred to him—as almost a certainty—that the adenoidal young fellow did not live at 21 at all ; or if he did, would be run over to-morrow and vanish utterly.

He was alarmed. Collecting up what drops of intoxication remained in that dissolving shadow of a bare-headed boy, he dived wildly across the thoroughfare and into another area of back-streets. The wine was leaving him. Outside a buzzing and tinkling pub a lonely flute-player syringed the cold air with his notes—" And the bells were ringing the old year out and the new year in." Gratefully Hugh gave him a sixpence ; " That's one of the old favourites."

" Ye-ye-yes," said the flute-player, his voice like a stammering piccolo. " The old ones I say's best ; but they d-d-don't appreciate them."

" Who don't ? "

" Th-these. . . ." He inclined his bowler hat towards the public bar and immediately, as though driven by a desperate task, set his lips again to the flute—" Yes, we have no bananas, we have no bananas. . . ." His small face was contracted with the fury of attention.

" You obviously don't like that so much."

" Eh ? "

" You don't like that so much.

" Silly, I call it. Now, wh-where's the melody in that ? Silly. But there it is, y'see ; they w-w-will have it." Again, he dismissed Hugh, plunging himself with awful and wet concentration into a fresh energy of notes. Some goad thrust him forward. Hugh stared and nervously crept away. He had no excuse for hanging here—till the tunes were over—till the flautist had disappeared into the public bar—had worked through the saloon bar. He could not excuse himself.

" Good night," he said. " P'raps we shall meet again."

" G-good night."

He reached a noisier street, full of excited life ; he was drawn towards it by cries beating against one another as on anvils, and then by flares and the teem of footsteps. There were a few stalls yet open ; and the crowd swayed in a patient stream from one to the next, gathering in eddies and whirls. A stall of apples—" Ap-pells. Ap-pells. Oh, ma, what apples. Look, ma, what apples." He passed it. A man in a dirty white overall beat upon the boards with the flat of a knife ; a mount of pink-and-white coconut-ice shrank slowly ; he carved off portions and flourished them into paper. A man with squeaking dogs, who looked wearily from side to side, squeaking and saying no more—" Boo-woo, boo-woo." The thickest stolid crowd pressed about an acetylene flare and a continuous patter ; the words bounded from wall to wall ; there was no doubt of them ; but Hugh persuaded himself forward through the bodies—to be closer and to see it all. From time to time the crowd bubbled into laughter.

He was selling medicines under the flare—his bottles stood there packed in ranks—a fat man that bulged exuberantly with red cheeks and a small pointed nose ; he swayed and twisted and his open waterproof swayed with him ; a careless homburg was pushed to the back of his head.

His fist, like a sudden pork chop, would be pounded upon his board, and the trestles shook and the bottles tinkled all together. ". . . And what I was saying to you when this gentleman very kindly put his question . . . very kindly, I must say, because it gives me a chance to deal with a point I might otherwise have overlooked . . . what I was saying—if I was to put a 'bus on the roads and you saw it coming along, you'd say, ' Why, it's a bloomin' pirate.' That's what you'd say. And why ? Because to give the simple reason, you've

been taught that a pirate 'bus is not a real 'bus. Now who taught you that? Why, public opinion taught you that, and all the newspapers you read taught you that. They tell you that any other vehicle plying in the public service is not a 'bus, though it may look like a 'bus and smell like a 'bus and carry you like a 'bus. You think of it as a pirate; and the prostituted Press repeats the same story, till you can't think any other way. Now, I don't want all you ladies to laugh like that as though I'd said something what I oughtn't to. You read a *kept-press*, kept by a set of bloated millionaires, *and* you know it. *And* you know it. I can see I have an intelligent audience. No need to inform you that the pages of such newspapers as I refer to are prostituted for the purpose of securing profits and should be used by no decent woman, but for wrapping a haddock in and medical purposes I will not specify. *Now* then—you get into my 'bus what you've been taught—*taught*, mark you—to call a dirty pirate. What do you find, ladies and gentlemen? You find that it has seats same as any other 'bus and carries you to your destination. Only the fares what you pay go into the pocket of a nice agreeable hard-working man like me, and not to swell the accumulated profits of the millionaires and all, what owing to their monopolistic position are enabled to compel the workers to make use of them every day in the week and every week in the year.

"*Now*, then. . . ." He thrust his hat still farther back, wiped his face and clutched a bottle. "Here we have it now. When you feel tired and fatigued, and that sort of nerve strain, and go into a chemist's shop, what does he offer you? The odds are he offers you Ner-ver-ine—Nerverine in a little bottle, half this size, and asks you one-and-six for it. This bottles I am selling at a bob, and," pursued the glistening creature, emphasizing every available word and hoarse with veracity, "*these* contents have been *made* up from the actual prescription of the *British Medical Association*, as obtained from an analysis of Nerverine . . . *as* any lady or gentleman capable of reading can see from the label . . . *and*, moreover, as I have offered here on every occasion, I will pay one hundred pounds to anybody who will examine my books, *and* obtain analysis of the contents of this bottle from any qualified chemist—proving the *contrary* of what I'm asserting." He gauged his crowd for a moment, panting grossly, with his eyebrows severely knitted; then he released a voice like a trumpet.

" And *why* is it you cannot purchase Nerverine in a chemist's under one shilling and sixpence a bottle, when *I* offer you double the amount of the same drug at a bob ? *Why* is it ? I'll tell you ; it's because Messrs Critchlow & Sprigg, the manufacturers of this here commodity, Ner-ver-ine, have had kind permission to put the royal coat-of-arms on the labels of their bottles, thereby implying that what's used by His Majesty the King is so valuable that every one else must pay extra for it. You're quite right, sir," croaked the seller of drugs, pointing a shaking forefinger at the speechless Hugh, " I quite agree with you. I do not use the argument that because the King takes this drug, its value is thereby enhanced. I do not suggest such a thing. The King has no more legs than yours and mine. The King has a nervous system like yours and mine. He has a duodenum and a colon similar to what you and I have—though you may not know what that means—and they function in the same manner. Why, if the King was to come along this street naked . . . well, we'll put him in a bathing costume for the sake of the ladies . . . you wouldn't have cause to look at him twice, not twice." He worked towards his climax. The crowd thickened ; short, flushed men were uttering hoarse words of enthusiasm ; the glass array rattled. " And now," said the vendor, in a suddenly lowered voice that vibrated tremulously, " I am selling these bottles, ladies and gentlemen, at one shilling per bottle. I am selling them . . ." A minute man, sprung from the shadows, was conveying bottles to the crowd ; the coins tinkled ; bending forward, the vendor breathed on, " One shilling per bottle. Do not buy unless you are convinced."

" I'll have one," said Hugh, nervously.

" And welcome, m'boy," spouted the vendor into his ear. " Here y'are. Half a shake ; I'll wrap it up with my own fair hands."

A man breathing of tobacco had caught the vendor by a shoulder. " More of that down here. Tha's right stuff to give 'em. They wa-ant it hot—*Red's* what they want it." With a final shake he lurched away ; the vendor stood like a rock.

" Have a drink," said Hugh boldly.

" *Hey ?* "

" Have a drink with me. You need it."

" Don't mind. Half a mo'. I will, m'boy . . . now just a

moment." His eyes dilated, he swept Hugh aside, and once more vociferated into his crowd.

Ten minutes later Hugh was in a saloon bar, right against the palm-leaves, face to face with this super-creature—on felicitous equality with it. The vendor drank fatly; he gave his husky answers—was first suspicious, then doctrinal and blunted. At the fifth tentative question he set down his glass. "Me? Of course, of course. I am a revol-utionary. I've preached revolution for fifteen years. I can't *help* it. See now. it's as natural to me as blowing bubbles to a baby in arms. Hey? Because it goes down in these streets? No, not a bit of it. No, *no*. D'you know *why* it goes down with this crowd? One reason, and I'm not saying it's the only reason, mind you——" He gazed for a moment with his forefinger quivering, "But *one* reason I will say is that I've been talking like that in this very street for three years. Every week for three years."

"You do something else as well?"

"Me? No, I don't. Of course. . . ." His whole manner became suddenly girlish; he wriggled. "I know what you mean. This isn't T.U. work. I'll agree that activity in the shop or factory *is* more important. I know my book." He drank, and releasing his glass faced upon Hugh like a bull. "How can I stand it? I've had enough of it and I've been victimized too often. If I went into the yard now, I'd stand it for a week p'raps or two weeks, and then I'd bloody well see red. I'm on my own now; I'm free. No man is my master. Of course, I still hold the Union ticket; oh, yes, and attend branch meetings; but work in the yards? No, no. I'm through with that till we've changed the system and then, by God! I'll *kill* myself with working if it would help." He closed his tearful eyes and drowned his emotion in his dregs. "And *now*, m'boy, with me . . ."

"M'yes. . . . I suppose it does undermine a man's endurance."

"By God, you're right. With some, mind you, with some. I'm not going to excuse myself. *I* know I'm an economic throw-back. You know your economics, I take it? You don't understand? Well, now, see here; *small—private—enterprise*, like what I'm engaged in with these drugs, was the peculiar feature of the first stages of merchant capitalism. We, you and me, are living in the era of concentration and monopoly . . ."

" Yes, I see it," said Hugh, hurriedly. " I see it."

" Ah," said the vendor, deeply with a resentful eye.

" But this . . . this theory, I'm choked with it. D'you know, I've reached that stage where it means nothing to me ; I want the real thing. I. . . ." He paused, feeling that this stranded fragment of industrialism could tell him little ; he was drawn against him and repelled ; this was a freak, a monstrosity. Was it only through freaks that he could find an avenue to the sea of slaves ? " I don't know," he said sombrely, " if there's a way in which I could participate a little in this struggle. I can't do much, you see ; I'm not able to do much, haven't the time and so on. But. . . ." He felt the suspicion that was never there, waved his hand and went on stickily. " Something I could do, no doubt. I feel the need for an active part. You could help me ? You know all about it ? "

The vendor thoughtfully tasted his lips and looked into the electric bulb. " H'm. Yes. Well . . . some what you might ask, say one thing, and some would say another. Personally, an' I'll speak straight out, I don't consider there is any place for the middle and upper classes *in* the movement. Not as at present constituted. Not as at present constituted." Hugh felt a strange and disconcerting relief. " Mind you, I wouldn't bias you. I could give you addresses where you'd be received with open arms. I could do so. I could write you a letter."

" Well—I'd like to hear what you mean first. See, I've told you straight something about myself. I wish you'd tell me whether you feel I'd best . . . keep out of it all."

" Well, no, I wouldn't say that."

" Perhaps I could come along here again and have a chat ? "

" And welcome, m'boy. Oh, certainly, and welcome. I'm here every week. Yes, same evening always. I'll give you my name. *Cer*-tainly you may."

But three streets from that saloon bar, and in solitude, he found that he had forgotten the name ; it had no meaning to him. That vendor was no more than an embryo—ploughing towards his revolution, almost sobbing with the pain of its non-fulfilment—a self-denuded gross fragment of the sea-bottom. And this time Hugh was elated with the mild and steady warmth. He remembered the market ; he remembered Number 21. He was still serene, even when an introspective fit crept up.

He'd been cowardly, but then he couldn't stand it; the idea of being caught in some huge and dreadful organization, with hundreds and thousands of others in it, and being told to work here and work there, and so finding nothing but resignation and a machine. "Later on," he kept telling himself, "later on perhaps. I'll see about it. Not just now. It's not what I want just now. I don't want to lose myself; I want to discover myself. I want strength. I have so much to do before I can—theoretically—in the vague future contemplate the idea of *work*."

"I can go home now," he thought comfortably, and carried himself erect, swinging his stick like a cutlass. Eve was a phantom only, and he fed on questions he conceived himself as making—and on answers the real Eve would never give. That didn't matter. He was bold; he was normalized; he had drunk of abysmal wells and the whole voice of streets applauded his confident footsteps as he strode along.

He climbed on to a 'bus, and again had the feeling that he'd earned something; he deserved a relaxation of the prodigious sinews. He nursed the thought awhile—of the cultured and weary intonation of his own kind—very restful and satisfying for a change—highly intelligent talk about nothing that mattered, eyes that knew him by his Christian name, a glass of port and something of Debussy languidly released over the keys of a piano. This was the negation of conflict, in the backwaters of fatigued brilliancy where one finds it no strain to be anarchistic and obscene.

Kindled with this idea, he left the 'bus as it passed through the West End, and loitered—rather uneasily and covertly—to a small artistic club. It was in one of these clubs that he had fallen against Evelyn, but their atmosphere was not, therefore, interpenetrated with her. He hadn't married the clubs in marrying her; he had rather picked her—and she him for the matter of that—out of their puddled deposits, as children scoop out shells and hide them against their bodies. So the club did not breathe of her, merely of his own privy world—the little cosmos that had no problems.

As he reached the doorway, female feet ran up the steps behind him and he turned.

"Hullo, Brabant."

"Oh, hullo, Reeves," he said, vaguely recalling an art student, who had sometimes appeared like a large water-lily

in groups about his table. They sat down together. " Will you have a port, too ? "

" Oh, no ; give me a coffee, for God's sake. I must tell you . . . I've just been at Ponck's studio. *You* know. Thanks, awfully, I will have a cigarette." She was shaking out her yellow hatless hair, her mouth full and overflowing with narrative ; and at the same moment, as it seemed, patting her pale arms, irritating the cigarette into her holder, setting both elbows on the table and dropping her chin between the hands. He gazed at her. Pneumatically her whole body rose towards him and fell again ; she was glancing as she spoke from side to side.

" Ponck's studio ? H'm ? "

" And . . . what was I saying ? Oh, it was a scream. But I got dead sick of it after a time. They were *too* ponged for me ; it just became a filthy shriek. I don't mind a little, but when you get Macvarlane *and* Polsky *and* Cyril Peach seeing who can claw each other's clothes off first, and Charles Thompson was *sick* . . . absolutely. He really spewed in the other room with the door open."

Hugh listened ; he understood it all ; he was contented. He caught a face here that recognized him and raised a hand to it—another there, and raised a hand and nodded. " So it was a bit rowdy, so to speak," he commented, to encourage the stream.

" Rowdy ? " The art student cascaded with excitement. " They were all *mad* . . . *mad.* I must tell you." Then someone stretched hands along the piano, and for a bar or so the faun questioned his afternoon, and wearily discarded it upon an unfinished cadenza. The pianist looked round. Music, the pervasion and the paraclete, had threaded the whole room with grey ; the ceiling had become a soft pulsation and surprise still hung about its corners. The pianist lit a lazy cigarette—and suddenly out stepped the Pavane, seductive dignity, the commingling of love and death ; a child, lusted after with godlike, sweet perversity, was carried remorselessly back into its bitter womb.

Hugh drank his port and listened and was carried along, himself resolved into the unvexatious dust. Pantaloon Club they called this, and lights were shaded with creamy saffron, and on its black walls were painted—the work of varying stylists—a dozen or so lean, wrinkled figures and faces. Panta-

loons, some grotesque and some obscene, among space still to be covered. One smirked anew, seeing in each—evilly conceived between wig and ruff—the portrait of a critic or academician of the older school. Pantaloons minced; here was the protest of youth—a revolution, but only in oil paints.

A young Jew bent across, spoke to the art student and glided nervously on. Hugh looked round the far tables and saw Lipper in argument, Silberstein somnolent and unabatedly smiling, a young man who broke the last bars of Pavane by tapping a pint-pot. A hand touched his shoulder and he glanced round; it was Rachel Hagen.

"'Evening, my dear Hughie."

"Hullo, Rachel; I didn't see you." But he felt that he *had* seen her—and refused to see her. Why? He stared at her, wrinkling his brows.

"I was wav-ing to you. You're quite late. They've gone . . . oooh, half an hour perhaps."

"Who?" said Hugh; and suddenly this room was not the Pantaloon; it was the Place-Of-Waiting. The Pavane had died; the black walls faded. He saw his life—first the flat with Eve and the fire and even the yellow cat; and then his countless streets of the evening infused with footsteps, the tinkle of bottles, sound of a flute, tones of an adenoidal boy. These were his two realities. He doubted neither. By the strength of the streets he was able to look again at his flat and say with a leap of anger, "Who?"

Rachel raised her eyebrows and put her head on one side. She was speculative. "Oooh, I thought you knew?"

"Huh! You . . . startled me, you know. I was thinking of someone else. Who are you talking about? Eve, I suppose?"

"Yes, and . . . isn't it? Let me see . . . your sister. I've seen her once or twice here, not liking the Pantaloon very much. And her husband with pince-nez, eh? And some other man."

He glared his question, carefully smiling at her.

"She introduced him to me. Something or other . . . Grim or Grum?"

"Grimball?"

"Agh, yes, yes, yes. Grimball." She explained him with her hands. It was enough.

" I'm sorry I missed them," said Hugh. " I had to go somewhere else. I'd no idea they thought of coming here ; " and he had not, he realized, the least idea how much Rachel might know. How much had Eve told her ? How much surmised to her about his strange behaviour ? *He* didn't know ; he didn't know *what* women might tell one another. Grimball ! —and hiding very badly a desire to be dramatic, he got up and took his hat.

" Are you go-ing ? "

" Yes, I think so. Yes, I think Eve will be waiting. D'you mind ? Another evening. Haven't met for some time. Good night."

He ran down the stone steps into the misty air. It was shocking—his delay, his delay of ten damned days ; all that time to her own devices. His knee began to hurt him again. Ten damned days, they stretched behind now like ten oceans. He had been criminal. He'd kept on telling himself he could carry on as long as he wanted. He was desperately excited ; jealousy lifted him on wings.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

His flat was quite empty—a shock that seemed utterly to change him. He stood in the dark doorway and became unsubstantial. Ideas of good and bad—decency and indecency —lost all meaning. He was a visitant from some emotional underworld ; and when the cat drew its tail against his ankle, he made a completely obscene remark in a thin voice, not startled but conversational, he was merely beyond restrictions. " Well," he said to himself, loosely swinging his stick. " Well . . ."

All he wanted to know was *where might she be ;* not whether she was coming back or if anything had happened, but simply *where*. . . . In his thoughts he spied upon her—was present impalpable and soundless at some definite spot of all the spots. *Where* was she ? To wait here, sitting like a monolith in a lighted room, like some monolith till she drifted in out of the darkness ? Impossible. He felt a wanderer and, closing the door softly, he flitted, still unsubstantial and vague-headed, down the stairs. All the lights had been turned off ; the main

doors of the block stood open ; night reached him through them like a frosty hand pressing him back to bed. He hesitated, belonging to no world—sure that he could not find her—unfitted for all intercourse. What to do ? He must have a moment of thought ; and when he heard footsteps outside, before he was aware of it—in the mere instinct of evasion, he had crept behind the heavy door.

He hadn't dreamed it was they. He kept assuring himself he hadn't. Some chance passers-in he had believed, who would run up the stairs and leave him again to his decisions. He hadn't *dreamed ;* but they stopped under the very archway and were beginning to bid each other good night ; and could he appear then out of his closet ? No, no. They need never realize he was there ; whereas *he* would have some notion, some clue, something to work on. In a moment he was dreadfully spying upon her and had flung himself beyond all shame. It was Eve alone with Geoffrey Grimball.

There had been a pause. " Well," his intensified voice was beginning, " I suppose it's au revoir for the moment. We seem to have reached your place like a flash of lightning."

" I'm glad it didn't take you too far out of your way. Thanks for coming."

He couldn't look his answer ; so he was forced to modulate a quietness. " Do you imagine I haven't enjoyed the journey ? One finds an immense pleasure in this kind of voyage through the dear old London by-ways when one has to go out of it all fairly soon. One remembers it, you know."

" You find your—friends happy to go for strolls with you through London ? "

Another pause—a slight difficulty. ". . . It's only occasionally that an experience of this kind remains in one's mind. Something in the peculiar flavour of it. Something finished, or almost finished. You know, I seem to have dreamed my way along here ; I don't feel I've really tasted it at all."

Bitterly laughable they were—so palpably determined that it should be safe ; but then these scenes have a way of splashing at a gasp into mere lunacy. Hugh choked it back, standing breathless, stiff as wood.

" You semi-foreigners get very romantic about London streets, Geoffrey."

". . . Ah, my dear, it's a combination of so many feelings," said the desperately congested Grimball, ploughing his way

through towards his terrifying goal. " I. . . . You see, when one sees hardly any but nigger women for months, the change, the romance if you like to call it that, staggers one. Yes, the ro-mance." He received the word from her with grateful relief and rolled it about. " The ro-mance. Yes. Wonderful."

" I suppose so," she said softly, but—Hugh recognized it —a trifle nervously. " Well, then. Au revoir. I think . . . when shall we meet again, Geoffrey ? "

" Again ? Why, to-morrow, shan't we ? I thought you were coming to tea at Maurice's. You know I'm staying with them . . . don't you ? You hadn't forgotten about to-morrow ? *I* hadn't."

She laughed gently. " No, of course, I hadn't forgotten. And I did know you were staying down there. I know one or two things about you, Geoffrey."

" Oh, I say. It's not through any unwillingness of mine to tell you more. Perhaps . . . I'm coming up to Town in the evening ; I've got to see a man, a fellow I met out there. Perhaps I could come up with you from Earl's Court. I don't want to see this fellow much, y'know ; but you realize how these things start. I expect it'll be a boring evening. May I perhaps, Eve ? " He just managed to breathe the name.

" Oh, it's charming of you. Yes, of course." There was a hesitation. " Ah, well, once again . . . good night."

" I say, just a minute. There's something I wanted to mention. Haven't had a chance yet. You know . . . it's that affair on Sunday—Sunday week, I mean, on the run in the car. I do realize I overstepped things a bit. One ought never to lose one's temper with these kind of blighters. *Never*. It's queer, but I'd never lose my temper with them on the West Coast ; and I've come up against hundreds and hundreds of natives that rile one. It's . . . well, I know it's inexcusable ; don't think I'm denying that ; but it's something in having women about like you, and I hate to get a suspicion that a dog's ill-treated. It won't happen again. I've chewed it over a lot."

She was put out ; she showed that this was an intrusion—a stupid element—and said hurriedly : " Oh, that ? As for that, I shouldn't remember it, if I were you. It's all past."

" Yes, I know, but . . . I had to explain a little. There were good motives. Only I was mistaken. Having a girl with me, makes me feel angry with anything objectionable or

violent, you know. Of course, as you said, women are quite able to take care of themselves and use their own judgment, and I think it's perfectly fine that they should."

"Look here, Geoffrey, let's discuss this some other time, if you really want to. I'm sure I don't." She was growing irritable; he *was* awkward—spoiling everything. Hugh understood so well; he had no sensation left, stood like a doomed spirit for all eternity.

"All right," said Grimball, after a pause, deepening over that earnest exchange of unspoken confidence. "*I* appreciate what you mean. Yes. Now, I suppose I must get on trek. By Jove, how cold my hand feels, in spite of the glove; that's the worst of it when one has accustomed oneself to a hot climate. Strange, isn't it?"

"Oh, your fingers are frozen. Poor dear, you haven't a chill? Is your body . . .?"

She was a little breathless, so was the man. He said something in a swift, confused voice—"Oh, yes, only my hands and feet." A curious suspense—they seemed inanimate.

"Yes," she murmured. "Yes. You know, your fingers . . . unbelievably cold. I am sorry. You must hurry. Are they really so cold? Touch my arm—I've just drawn my sleeve up a wee bit." She had cooled her voice now into a drawl with thickened, sensuous accent; it meant fear or anger or both. "Oh, *yes*. Very frozen."

"Eve . . . I've chilled your arm; it was so warm before." He seemed to be panting. There was a sudden shifting in the poise of feet—a fractional spasm of time while the bottom fell from the world—and the same voice was rapidly effacing the event. "You must forgive me. Don't think hardly of me. I . . . you know to be frank I wouldn't undo it if I could. You're so delightful; you know you are, and you don't need me to tell you." He dropped into a soft childishness, alluring—most innocent. "Oh, you can't be furious with *me*, not with *me*. I know I shouldn't have, but I haven't had many deep pleasures in my life. Nothing so profound and fine as this." All most pathetic, most natural to him, and it saved whole seas of uncertainty and doubt.

"I'm not angry with you, Geoffrey," she said on a shriller pitch, and composed herself. "I don't feel inclined to be angry with you; but good-night now. Be a good boy, Geoffrey. See you to-morrow."

" Good-night . . . Eve." He vanished through the doorway along the clinking pavement. She stood a moment and then walked soberly upstairs. The door of the top flat closed with a feeble snap and silence fell like a curtain of snow. Hugh came out.

Such appalling things do not happen—they do not actually *happen*—beyond the substance, that is, of weak day-dreams and fantastic literature. They do not happen, because they are next to impossible. Human anguish drives in and breaks through the meshes of so awful a petrifaction ; it must do so. We all know it must do so. And yet, shudder as he might, in the untraceable caverns of the past the event stood. He was certain that a creature he well comprehended—Hugh Brabant —would never, of course, have acted in that way, behind an open door and failing to rush into conflict, exclamation, furious surprise. He was certain, *even now quite* certain. It was not his nature.

But the thing had been, and must become a part of him. He did not try to dissolve the ghastly paradox. He was wandering through the streets, passing rows of houses, lamp-posts, garden railings, cold air clinging all about him like a damp spider's web, intolerably fatigued, and with eyes that were a bruise. He couldn't face her now ; his body had told him that without the pause for inquiry. He was carried forward.

Action, decisive and brutal. That was the secret he had drained out of the past ten days. He didn't question it. It poured mechanically into all his extremities, and his hands pulsed and his tongue was energetic. He lashed himself into strength, action, decisive and brutal. He was scarcely thinking of Eve at all.

He found himself leaning over the Chelsea Embankment, his mind swaying with the waters, and for a while—to ease himself—building up all the things he should have done and might have said. How he would, to begin with, have come upon them through the doorway or down the stairs ; and would have said. . . . It did not alter the fact that he had not. Not yet. Not yet. With a plan shaping itself, he stood beating his finger-joints against the stone parapet. Amazing knowledge came to him, that he had the power to hate ; he laughed and choked and laughed again into the heaving belly of the tide.

On a seat a young man drooped, silent, in a torn grey overcoat and splayed boots—body all crushed together. Hugh

stopped at his knees. " You're cold. You must be. I'm chilled myself."

The being lifted its head and replied, as though it had not spoken for days. " It's a bit parky, isn't it ? " and cleared its throat.

" It's growing bitter. Here, come along with me to a coffee-stall, will you ? "

He looked for a pause down the Embankment. " A'right. I don't mind."

" I . . . I don't want to force you to come *with* me. I'd like to stand you a cup of something."

" Yes. I'll come along." He rose up restrainedly, his tone and expression colourless. They walked away. The man gazed straight ahead. He would show no curiosity. When he had spoken, his lips seemed to come apart with a sticky valvular gasp, release their phrase and fall back. Impulsively Hugh took his arm, and all the time it quivered.

" My God ! " said Hugh, and his voice came in jerks he could not modulate. " How is it you stand it ? How do all you people endure ? Is it patience ? "

The young man made a husky sound that was laughter. " No. It isn't patience . . . not properly speaking. We're just different to what your lot is. That's all. We look at everything different somehow."

" Different ? What way ? I know you're right, but *how?* I can't *see*. It's cold, isn't it, and hunger and callousness just the same ? "

" Well, y'know . . . we stand and wait because we always have stood and waited ; and it isn't so much colder because it never *is* very warm—see ? You've got a comfy bed to get back to when you just think you will. See ? You can't imagine without it. That's all." He was not rancorous ; he was a perfect guest.

" Yes, I know. I know. I know. But if I had to endure a quarter, a tenth, of what you have to, *all the time*, I should be frantic with the wickedness of it. I should go and burn down Westminster Abbey or smash into a policeman. I know I should."

" I bashed a copper once. Some years back now. With the unemployed. A brick. Caught him fair on the chin. They didn't have *me*. Had some of the other boys. We get mad altogether . . . see ? That's what it is. Not separate somehow.

Don't know why. See, we feel every one else's living same way as us and it don't occur—unless we all get riled together."

" But we're not living all the same way. I'm not. I've got a bed, comfort, food ; you haven't."

" Well, it's just different. You're not the same sort as us. You . . . don't count somehow, if you'll excuse me saying so. I don't know. That's how it is. See ? " Again he cleared his throat. " There isn't so much between being free and being in quod for us, as there is for your sort. Or between working and resting. Or between living and dying, for the matter of that."

They walked on ; they saw the coffee-stall. It was an interlude, but through it and apart from it a plan still condensed in his mind like steam. He was hot with decision ; he was thirsty for to-morrow.

There was still a side of instinctive blankness toward that woman he had married. He contrived no special action around her—created no phrase for her. She was rather the quite unquestionable cause, the medium in which grew his very thoughts, the substance among which his roots were now eternally enmeshed.

Maurice had a maisonnette, the lower part of a broad house, whose bricks had weathered into a dull substantiality. Its hall was lofty, paved with white and black tiles. Beyond this its drawing-room, looking out upon the small green garden, was saturated with innocence, almost blasé with it. It was transparent, even at a sensitive glance, that the precise cream of the walls, the moss-green carpet, the paler stalk-green cretonne of the curtains and chair-covers, the veined alabaster bowls of the electric lights had been selected at one time from a single West End firm ; they were scented with esteem and reputability. The grand piano, too, and the large upholstering, the white marble fireplace and cabinet gramophone, all held the room down and assured one of its permanence. This result achieved—and breath confidently taken—the drawing-room, colour-scheme and all, resembled the spiritual frondage of some painfully fastidious child.

They sat round waiting for the tea-tray to come hot before them, and the white cake-stand and the buttered scones. Eve had been there ten minutes. An engaging free-heartedness the Shipleys had, invariably they had it in their own home.

It wasn't difficult. Life had so arranged itself that, when the latest anecdotes were through—with perhaps a play or so for ballast, someone might have a scrap of scandal; and talk of their little son could follow, and then the child itself; and if time remained the gramophone stood there to suck up the languishing drops of conversation; or Irene might even sprinkle a melody upon the piano—the weightier side, the pathetic six o'clock spirituality—just to show they could do it; and so to "*Must* you go then?" It needed no premeditation; and instinctively Eve hated it all, down to the very colour-scheme. She churned this over thoughtfully between the unavoidable comments. The white—and the *greens*, what was wrong with them? Queer. Somehow an assumption of shades she was utterly used to and rather despised. No life in them. They were irritating. Why had almost every piece of silver to be animalesque—flies or cats or penguins? And wooden two-dimensional figures on the black shelves, an absolute froth of them, and all their colours so half-hearted and guileless and fragrant? Everything in silhouette. It was the full and the not inexpensive efflorescence of the essential Shipley mind; and it annoyed her, not because she wanted this kind of thing—good heavens, no—but that anyone, who *dared* to blossom into permanence, should achieve a permanence so repulsively quaint. They needed coarsening. That was it; what Hugh had said about them once in a fit of exasperation, that they were just a couple of blasted Peter-pantheists, described them very well.

Tea entered, smoothly chiming. They enlarged themselves towards it. Geoffrey was handing her a cup, and she glanced at him, thinking rapidly—he's not so agreeable in the light, especially light reflected from this cream and these greens in such a tinkling room. But she offered him a little smile he could interpret anyway he liked. She was still considering that remark of Hugh's—and the natural manner it had slid up into her mind—just as if Hugh was there. It was strange. He, irritating as he was and hesitant and ridiculous in his demands and so sulky, seemed an absolute part of her own mind. Why on earth was it? Part of her body even. A kind of commentary on life she had simply digested whole. She wriggled her shoulders.

Geoffrey was watching her bite a piece out of the scone; she hoped to goodness they didn't see him; it would be so

complicated. She ought to have selected someone else ; but he'd really seemed easiest because he knew so little and she could make all the rules ; whereas the men one met at Rachel's for example, or the Pantaloon—no, they all knew too much ; and she wasn't quite prepared for that, not yet at any rate—till she saw whether Hugh was really daring to risk it much longer.

" It's a pity," smiled Maurice, after a conjectural pause, " that old Hugh couldn't get along this afternoon. I *am* sorry."

" Oh, yes," said Irene, shifting the milk-jug, glancing at the fire and taking a look at Geoffrey's cup. " Rotten I call it. Not ready yet ? All right, shout when you are. Ye-es. We don't get much chance of seeing him, do we, except when we happen to go down there together for a week-end, and then everything seems so . . . hurried and squashed up, doesn't it ? " She wrinkled her nose. " You know what I mean. Such a swarming flood of us, like spawn. One doesn't get time to distinguish any special person." She laughed.

Geoffrey ate on with nervous industry, looking at nobody.

" Quite," pursued Maurice, the firelight on his pince-nez. " Quite." He roused himself. " Er . . . he's such jolly interesting company. I find him. What. . . . May I have another cup ? . . . What did you say this exam. was he's just taken up."

" Hugh ? Oh . . .," Eve raised her eyebrows and smiled. " Some insurance exam., you know. They think he ought to take it. Classes."

" Oh." A pause. " Where does he go for classes, Evelyn ? " cried Irene, diving behind the tea-cosy.

" Where ? Oh, in the city, I think." She looked round for information ; there was none. " Really, I'm not sure. Moorgate . . . or Newgate p'raps, or . . . one of those places, you know."

" M'm," said Maurice. " Ye-es. Exams. do take up a lot of valuable time. *I* know."

" I can't help laughing, Evelyn darling, every time I think of Hugh really going in for an exam. Funny. Tell me how much time does this class take up ? "

Sweet inquisitor—bless their fragrant curiosity ; she determined hastily with a pout : " Oh, not much time, but didn't

I tell you what else ? Poor old boy, he got a little livery and says he *must* have exercise. Walks. In the evening."

Surprise, smoothed rapidly into solicitation. " That's rotten."

" Maurice must drop in and see him. What would you do about *liver*, Maurice ? But . . . where does he walk, Evelyn ? "

" Oh, round the parks and so on," said she carelessly. One might as well round off the fable.

" Maurice, I'll send you with him to get down your fat. When's he going on his next . . . *walk ?* You must keep an eye on him, Evelyn, wandering out like this by himself. I think it would be a *very* good plan for Hugh and Maurice to keep one another out of temptation."

" M'm—well, *I* think it's a callous idea," said Maurice. " What about you, Grim ? "

The constricted Geoffrey took his eyes from the clock and murmured, " What ? Walking ? All depends on who you're with."

" With Hugh."

" Hugh ? Oh, Brabant. I . . . h'm, h'm . . . sorry, I wasn't quite following. I was distracted a moment. Sorry."

" You've got to exercise Hugh and clear up his liver," said Irene, kindly. " See ? Because Evelyn's growing into a grass-widow, and *we* don't see anything of Hugh either." She whisked a smile to Eve round the tea-cosy, and settled herself back. " Quite a grass-widow."

". . . Well, we get the unique pleasure of her undiluted company," essayed Geoffrey. " I mean, I like seeing people for a short time without their husbands . . . or wives," he added, huskily, after a few thoughtful moments, and cleared his voice. " Gives one a fresh idea. You people have opportunity for seeing so many aspects of your friends, you know ; I only just get to realize someone a little, and then . . ." There was a sympathetic pause, but awkward. Maurice and Irene were both looking at him.

Eve said : " Isn't he charming ? You're training him very nicely——" and was irritated with herself and laughed brightly.

The young man replied : " H'm. If you're . . . satisfied, then I'm profoundly pleased. Absolutely."

This was difficult; she stood up with her cup and their attention slipped. No, *really*, no more. Thanks. She gave him a far-away glance from under her hat-brim. It was sexless as a nymph. If he was going to behave like this, it wouldn't matter so much except for *them*. She peeped at him doubtfully; he was looking at the clock again; they were moving back the tea-table and the fire was given a poke. Every one now glanced covertly at the clock-face. There was a pensive silence—the silence of the quietly fading palate.

Eve sat with a sense of frustration, and it always seemed to be Hugh, present or absent, that queerly constrained her. She wanted to fight. It was the only reason she had for throwing herself against their company a week before—vague hope that, with Hugh, sulking somewhere, she could enjoy the slow openings of the struggle. Geoffrey had come in as an afterthought, a surprise—she hadn't imagined him as in London. It had been rather a mistake perhaps; it made it too complicated.

She took another cigarette. Her mind, damped back upon itself, became privily destructive, more than usually blunt and ruthless; she looked round with a fresh contempt—boorish and ox-like—mentally crushing the whole flimsy fabric of their civilization. It was not hers, and nothing in it pleased her; she had no inclination to handle it; only to annihilate. They did not understand her; they had no curiosity about her; and in some incomprehensible way their very fullness and permanence seemed to stifle her faintest effort at expression. If only she could force Hugh. Two minutes had passed. The others stirred plaintively; from beyond the garden rose up the weary rollick of a small brass band, undecided cornets clamped together by a bassoon. "M'm—I wish they'd go away," said Maurice placidly. "Don't you?"

"Who are they?"

"M'm?" The word Unemployed spouted somehow into the conversation; subtly it exacerbated.

"No one else would play so horribly," said Irene, with a tinkle of laughter.

". . . Except those Hun bands," commented Geoffrey like a cough. "You remember. I thought the war had rid us of all that. These blighters have simply invaded their empty place. Ought to be prohibited. Imposition on anyone."

"So startling and inconsiderate in a quiet road," said Irene.

" I always feel inclined to throw a brick at them, don't *you*, Evelyn ? "

Eve paused ; Irene's voice was cosy—confidential. It drew curtains round them and said : " We are one flesh " ; it excluded all the painful probing that was so essentially Hugh. She tried to rebel. " Oh, well . . ." She hesitated again, could hear nothing but the pump-pump of the brass band. If only that cornet would come through the window and blast the whole place into thin air. " It doesn't worry *me*." Their eyes waited for her ; it was a matter of loyalties. " I don't object to the music."

" Music ! " Geoffrey choked it back at once, but it had the sharpest of edges. She glared at him. He sat forward nervously. The room appeared to hum about her ; she heard a protective quiver of laughter from Irene. Why couldn't she speak ? What atmosphere in this family of Hugh's made her so weak and inexpressive on a sudden ?

The door opened. " Mr Hugh Brabant," said the maid, and the door had closed again. The band beat triumphantly into its second item.

An inestimable thing, one's domestic and ordinary manners ; they give one time to recover. There was a spasm of open mouths ; then " How jolly. . . ." " M'm, come and sit here, old man." " We meet again, Brabant." There was hearty laughter. He sat down on the very edge of a chair. She could see he was flushed ; he moved his feet forward, moved them back again ; the white of his eyes was shifting. After the first recognition, he didn't look towards her. There was a gap of moments ; that flow of good manners hadn't clarified after all—merely postponed. A fresh start—" M'm—sorry to hear you're not fit, not feeling fit," said Maurice, blinking.

" Me ? "

" Evelyn told us you'd had a touch of liver."

" Oh ? . . . Yes. Yes." He jerked his head back attentively and half-turned towards her. He had understood.

Irene swayed her foot from side to side. " You're taking long walks, I hear. Trying to walk it off."

" Yes."

" M'm—it's quite good walking weather."

" Yes." The cornet breathed a long wailing note and the Shipleys tossed in irritation. Geoffrey, glum and criminal, staring all round Hugh and never at him, was transparently

thwarted and wondering how it had all happened. Irene's lips began to frown ; Eve saw them and grew dizzy. Was it real ? Five minutes ago no Hugh—and now Hugh, sitting on the edge of a chair. *Hugh*. She could not accommodate herself. She was helpless like a bubble, and he treated her like a bubble. She felt that for him she was not part of the group.

Irene was puzzled : " What is it ? Something on the floor ? " He had been running his eye along the carpet from his feet to theirs—a vague, unconscious movement, repeated over again.

" Nothing," he said loudly. Eve felt in a sick way that he was measuring the ground ; her alone he ignored. " Nothing," he repeated and laughed heartily—rubbed his palms together, spread them towards the distant fire and catching them back in a moment dropped them on his chair-arms.

Suddenly he said : " Those fellows playing out there. I passed by them. They've all got wooden legs . . . ex-service. All three of them."

It was unexpected ; there was a flutter. Maurice's face began to weaken, but his wife was first. " How do you know ? "

" Medals on."

" Oh."

She laughed nervously ; it was the tinkle on a metallic tone. " Still, I don't see why they should spoil our tea-time." She pouted. " There's plenty of *other* things a man can do besides make a noise. You don't play the cornet with your *feet*, Hugh."

" Is that a joke ? "

Her lips hardened and then she smiled at the ceiling, swaying her foot. " It's just whatever you like to think it, my dear boy. It's a fact, anyway. They *sound* as if they were playing with their feet. Why don't they do some quiet work ? "

" You *people*," he said, forcibly kicking out a leg. " Whenever I'm with you, I seem to come into a world of dreams, or on a kind of pantomime stage. Quiet work ? Where ? When ? How ? " He waved his hands and abruptly dropped his voice to a suave, friendly note, coiling it smoothly on and on with thoughtless laughs between sentences. " I don't know how you feel, of course ; but I can't see such a band without thinking it might easily be me."

" Oh, but . . .," complained Maurice, fatly indignant, " that's ridiculous. You're not, because you happen to work

at Lloyd's. You've got a profession. So have I. I know *I've* got to sweat myself over it, and I expect you have to." He paused ; he was serious and he glowed a little.

" You mean that we are a decent dutiful part of society ? "

" Mmm—yes. Yes. We do something somebody's got to do. I mean, you must have doctors, and, mmm—insurance "—he sought the word—" brokers." The band suddenly left them ; it was like bath water drawn off without warning and exposing them nude. They fidgeted. Cautiously launching his voice on the new atmosphere, Maurice concluded. " I just carry on my profession that *has* to be carried on in this way, and I don't interfere with anyone. As a professional man, I do it as decently as I can. I'm quite contented to do so. I know only a fool would complain of it." He was moved by his own words, a trifle self-conscious, and looked at his wife for approval. She gave him a quick glance.

" We're wandering a bit," said Hugh. " Still, what of it ? Blessed phrase ' professional,' isn't it ? " They stared, but he was far past it. " You mean that I'm a fool for suggesting that you're unnecessary. No, no, you didn't mean that. Don't bother to explain ; keep cool. You mean that only a fool would try and remould a state of society into which you fit so adequately. No, no, you don't mean that either. You needn't expostulate. *You* mean that you, as a doctor, would certify for insanity anyone who seriously worried the smooth flow of your professional duties—and might even certify him as homicidal and knock him on the head. Oh, well, I'm wandering on now. Never mind. I say, Maurice, you like embryos, don't you ? "

Eve's skin tingled. She was enjoying it most guiltily. Was he drunk ? Just a little ? She discovered with a start that she had been unable to think of him as anything but perfectly sober. They were all dumb. " How . . . how d'you mean ? " said Maurice. " I don't *like*—well—embryos."

" I've been studying one. Truly," said Hugh, with eyes fixed on him. " I want to be serious now. I want to appeal to you as a doctor. This embryo I'm talking about . . ."

" I *say*," burst in Mr Grimball. " I say, I don't quite think. . . . I don't mind myself, but there *are* limits, damn it *all*." He glanced indignantly from one to other of the women, and realizing in that glance that they were—after all—the wife and sister of the wretched man, he felt his earth drop away.

He sank back. " I think it's a queer—a bit of a medical—subject. What ? " He plunged for a cigarette and lit it furiously.

" Oh, I only used the term metaphorically. Quite a common metaphor."

" H'm. Well, *I* don't know what language they talk in studios and art-clubs. I can't be expected to. What ? As a matter of fact, I'm afraid I don't go in much for this modern poetry. Prurient stuff, and too outspoken to be any pleasure to a fellow. When a fellow is doomed to be a practical man like me, up against the dead realities of danger among a lot of niggers, one doesn't find one has much time for that sort of dope."

" Oh, I quite agree with you," said Hugh charmingly. " Modern poetry *is* filthy. Anyway most of it. We can clear away any divergencies on modern poetry. It's punk." He cleared it away with his hand—a miasma above the moss-green carpet, and chattered on. " They're thin, fatigued people, the poets, because they feel nowadays that, while they produce something, it's always still-born. It has substance, and is palpable, of course ; oh, yes, and it has a certain capacity for putrescence—for stinking noisily ; but it can't carry on and insist and reproduce itself. Prurience ?—You mean the sort of lavatorial consistency about it all. Same thing, you see. It goes with the sense of dead ends, sexlessness. Oh, we agree to dispense with *them*."

Irene, with the instinct of danger, leaned forward. " What ? Our poetry to-day ? " She blinked at him ; but after all why should he know more about it than she did ? Anyway. . . . " It's all piffle. Every one knows we're producing poets and novelists *quite* as great as at any period. What's wrong with them ? What about Ethel Spatewell and Ruckleigh and . . .?"

" Grimball doesn't like 'em," he said quickly.

" Oh, well." She was reckless and threw over the man of action. " Geoffrey's out of England most of the time. He can afford to know nothing about them. *He* was only talking personally ; but you're just indecent. You're like a disgusting horse breaking through and trampling all over flower-beds and lawns. That's what you remind me of. You *used* to like poetry, and now you don't, nobody else may. *You* don't care. You want to spoil it for those who *do* enjoy a little quiet and . . . er . . . beauty after perhaps working hard all day. I

don't understand that kind of thought. I wish I did." She dropped back into her chair.

" All the same," smiled Hugh, " to go back a trifle. As it happened I wasn't taking a poetic metaphor when I spoke about embryos. The excitement is over nothing. Suppose we start again. Now this embryo isn't in a glass bottle. No, no ; don't. I must tell you about it. I'll show you ; I will really. Maurice . . . Grimball, would you like to come some evening ? "

They were mute. " Hugh, you're tedious," said Irene, abruptly.

Eve's constraint burst. " He's *not*, Irene. I want to hear about it ; " and she became a husk again with a heart beating violently inside it ; and Hugh laughed loudly, rubbing his knee. She looked at them all and her dizziness swept up. It was queer. They were staring at him, not as if they thought him mad or drunk, but as if they *understood ;* and she didn't understand.

Maurice was polite. " Afraid I don't find much time, old boy."

" No, no, but this won't take long. Let's drop metaphors." They moved suddenly as under a spasm of cold water. " It really is rather a strange phenomenon, and you don't recognize it unless you look for it carefully. It's something to admire. What about you, Grimball ? You want to see a *vital* phenomenon to compare with your native tribes when you go out again ? "

He fidgeted. " You wouldn't think the native blighters were specially vital, if you. . . . Depends what you mean by vital."

" Destructive is what *he* means by vital," said Irene, with closed eyes. " You can rely on that. If he doesn't like a thing, he criticizes it out of existence." Her lips were quivering angrily. " Look at the way he talks about . . . embryos. It's clear *you* can't appreciate what it's like to be a woman ; you wouldn't be so utterly coarse. You've never had any pain. To you it just means something external, quite insignificant, oh, quite. You can't understand danger. . . ." There was a vague consternation ; Eve resented this. She frowned.

" Ah, but *this* embryo," began Hugh cheerfully ; and the door opened. Their faces were in an instant pure and fixed.

Eve chilled—a birth through this gateway into their company, it could be nothing else—and a child of three walked in—white socks and white woollen jersey—sure of reception; small features and face like Irene's, or, if anything, more like Hugh's. The controlling hands could be felt through the door; no one set eyes on them. Eve, holding her breath, had grasp of several things in a moment—Geoffrey a trifle shocked as though something obscene were impending; Maurice certain that action ought to be taken; Irene far more than certain—but Hugh was in front of her. "Hullo, it's Paul. How do, Paul? Come to your Uncle Hugh."

Without any noticeable dislocation of air, the mother had passed him and lifted the boy. "Well, darling." She faced Hugh, exquisitely cool and, thought Eve, unusually maternal for Irene. It had been a birdlike swoop. The boy stared speechlessly from one to other of them, surprised and searching for depths, twisting his head and body half round as on a pivot.

"I didn't want you quite yet, darling." The room was alive with realities, but under the child's eyes sudden play-acting, parade of smiling waxworks and a place where nothing happens—and Hugh slipped his hands into his pockets; and Irene, looking anxiously at the child, more like Hugh than anyone else, seemed half-frightened of it, in case its life were after all to be her dissolution. "Is Nanna there? Nanna, *will* you wait till I ring, please?" She passed quietly through her own doorway; they could hear the smooth directions. "Yes, I think so. Yes, a few minutes. Come later, darling, and then we'll have a game."

The room never thawed again; it had no chance. Certainly that waxen quality began to melt from Maurice's face, as soon as with gratitude he saw no more of his child; but Hugh was thwarted and stiff with conflict. He wouldn't sit down, and when he took his fingers from his pockets, they were for a time stretched out like sticks. Irene drifted back into the room with curves and scents of her fresh maternity still abundant on her; and she didn't drop them; she made use of them while she had them. Calmly dominant, she glanced busily round and then beckoned Hugh with her shoulders. "Hugh, just a moment. Do you mind? I want to. . . ." The others should sit quiet and toast their toes. She drew him over to the stalk-green curtains, through which a dim light filtered.

Eve had never hated her quite so much. She perspired with indignation—and hadn't the least idea why.

Maurice felt it difficult; he attempted. "Mmm—he's growing, isn't he? Paul, I mean. Have a cigarette?"

"No, thanks," she said, and almost rose. Why did Hugh suffer it? It was intolerable.

Hugh burst out laughing and said in an outrageous voice: "No, no. My dear child, don't apologize. *I* won't teach him any of his uncle's nasty ways." She was answering him rapidly. "Why?" he went on, "what's the secret? What. . . . What? Oh, punk, *they* know all about it. I shan't teach him to swear." She seized his sleeve and explained; he listened awhile. "What ideas do you mean? Now tell me that? Tell me honestly now what ideas you think I'd communicate into his charming little head? What? There, you see, you can't. You're unable to explain what it is you don't like about me. Some doctrine. Some vague perversity. God knows what. Bless your maternity, he's quite safe with me. *I* won't teach him to break his mother's heart."

She threw off this reserve; and at once every one seemed curiously to be rising and Hugh turning back to the group. "Well, you ought to be pretty good at it. You worry mother enough, Hugh."

"Eh?" He laughed over his shoulder. "*I* do? What rubbish; she's incapable of worry . . . deep worry, I mean. I know her better than you do. But we'll talk about it later. Sometime later. We'll have a special chat about it. I'll ring you up one morning soon and fix up, when you're alone." He glanced at Eve and his face suddenly twitched; he stopped, went red; he jerked round to his sister. "Yes. Yes. We're off now; I'm off now, see? Don't you worry. Good-bye, old girl, and thank you. Good-bye, Maurice. Good-bye, Grimball. I'm really glad to meet you again. I say, that matter we were talking about . . . yes? I made a joke of it, y'know; but you just come along. When can you? What evening?"

"Irene was suggesting," said Eve, tunefully, "that Maurice and . . . h'm . . . ought to go out walking with you."

"Oh, *well*, then, of course." He waved a diary. "How long are you in Town, Grimball?"

"Not very long."

" Quite long enough. Let's make a date. No, no. I'll ring you up, too. We must get off. I'll ring you up in a day or so. Good-bye." He had turned himself cyclonically about twice, disengaged himself and eddied towards the door; and Maurice followed like a courteous but belated afterthought. The front door slammed behind the two visitors.

There was a little pause. Geoffrey was the least controlled of the three. He remarked in a calm voice: " Well? I suppose he's mad. Or shell-shock is it? "—and found himself talking to a family council. He at once became very attentive, sitting forward with his hands clasped; he looked from one to the other as they commented, nodding occasionally.

Maurice lay back. " Mmmm—no. He's not mad, or shell-shock. Oh, no. *We* understand him all right. Picked up a few queer ideas. *Some*times I find him fairly amusing." He brooded a moment. " *Some*times." He wanted to forget about it all; the evening was declining towards dinner.

" He said something about certifying for insanity," murmured Irene; and she dragged her work-basket towards her. " What was it? "

" M'm? Ye-es. Only makes me more sure he's perfectly sane."

" Oh, *yes*. Of course." She took out a woollen sock and began to knit.

" Oh, no doubt about that," said Maurice. " It's a matter of his theories. You get a background of all these disturbances . . . strikes and agitation and what not; he's an eccentric type."

" I won-der," surmised Irene, among her needles. " I've often wondered in the last few days . . . what do you think? Is he getting something out of it? I could understand that. Is there any business advantage? One can't tell nowadays with Labour Governments and so on. Don't you suppose it might be? " She looked up frowning.

Maurice thought not. " Oh, no. No. Nothing at all of that. Just eccentric." He didn't want to probe further; he wriggled under it. A man wasn't out to *make* something all the time; these women are materialists at bottom. " No harm in it. He'll get over it—mmm."

" But he must do it for *some* reason," she said plaintively. " I wish I could see." She knitted awhile in silence. " Quite between ourselves I'd hate to find Paul growing up anything

like Hugh." She brooded. "You don't think there's any chance? I feel Hugh might *tell* him things."

"What things?" said Maurice irritably.

"Well . . . Hugh's so *horrible* to mother. He really is. I believe he doesn't care in the least about her ease of mind and comfort. Honestly I feel all nerves and strung-up when he's down there with us. Mother's so harmless and unsuspecting. She'd *never* imagine that one of her own children . . . oh, I can't explain. One gets to know by experience. That's all."

No one replied. The atmosphere suffered a profound depression, out of which—like the last flower lifting its head—her voice perked up again. "Are you going to let him take you—wherever it is he means?"

Maurice heaved himself. "Oh, I don't see much point. Fantastic."

"I'll go," said Grimball, suddenly.

He had become part of the furniture. She was confused, then pleased. "Will you? I think it would be a very good thing. And Maurice *ought* to go. I rather want. . . ." Her voice faded among the needles. She hummed softly for a while. The skin of their early evening grew dull and crusted; they sat somnolent; in a few minutes it would split of its own accord and release them to the nursery—to the study—towards the open air and the lonely 'bus-ride to Piccadilly Circus.

## CHAPTER NINE

Eve blinked and woke up; and here she was trotting—he walked rather quickly—beside him round a square. It was never in her mind not to leave the Shipleys when he did. She'd answered to him, not to the others; vegetation becomes submissive so, with the unnoticed setting-out of tendrils, suckers, inter-organic roots. It was strange, however. Almost darkness now and the lamps lighted, and air neither cold nor hot, pricking the skin. At the corner she said, "Hugh . . .?"

"M'm?" He'd gone sapless, not knowing how even to think about it al l; he still hurried.

" Hugh, *stop*. You must stop. I'll sit down if you don't ; " and when he jerked up, she began fingering his lapel, and saying, " I s'pose it is you. I'm not going so fast in case it's a strange man." " M'm." " Oh, don't be incoherent ; I've come, and you must humour me . . . even if you think I don't deserve it. It is you ? "

" Who else d'you imagine ? " he said huskily ; and she suddenly remembered Grimball and went on fingering him ; and he with a stiff gesture said " H'h. You're not sure ? Would you recognize . . . let's see . . . my ring ? H'h." He held out his hand wearing a ring she had once given him. She pawed his hand without speaking.

" Well ? D'you know it ? "

" Silly," she said ; and peeping one way and then the other stooped and bit his hand sharply. " That's what I feel like. Now you know." She let it go and caught it again. " Wet, but it isn't blood ; only where I sucked it. You were good back there, but not enough. Why did you leave off so quick ? You popped too much ; you jumped from one thing to another ; you threw away every idea just when it was working up. . . . You did, y'know. Why did you ? That's why I bit you ; you've excited me. I had to relieve myself somehow. But I s'pose I've got to come along with you now. Come along, silly."

She slipped her arm through his. He'd borne it all as he might water, staring and nothing more with a twisted half-smile. She felt his ribs tighten and quiver as he held her. Voices cried. Over a low wall came laurel frondage with its stinging odour. She saw a cat crawl from a gateway and arch its back lasciviously.

He said, " Yes. . . . To-night's very quiet and sober. Slower ? Slower still ? " They walked awhile. " Must we go back home ? "

" There's no need."

" Won't Mrs Lamb be waiting ? "

" She's out."

" Is she ? "

" She's gone early every night — for the last . . . few days."

" Yes."

She began to drowse along, musing gutter-smells when they came, dead leaf smells, gas-lights pale yellow—she stopped to

open her collar and took her gloves off. She waited and said, "Well? . . ."

"Yes. You want to know, I suppose. Yes. Yes, I was coming to it; I was just gathering my thoughts to . . ."

"Well?" She shook his arm.

He fumbled about it. "I wish *you'd* let me know what you . . . suspect already."

"No."

"Why not?" he said.

"Oh. Oh, well, I know you haven't been with women anyway."

"No," he said, and grew silent.

"At least you haven't yet. Did you think about it?"

"Once or twice . . . to-day."

"Why to-day?" she said quickly.

"M'm?" he answered wearily. "To-day? Did I say to-day? Perhaps it was chance, if anything is chance"; and they were both remembering that darkened hall of the night before, but from grossly diverse angles, and neither wished to confess—just for the moment. She knew he was glad to have her, beyond anything he said; and that he'd carried her off with him from the Shipleys—no other phrase would suit. Enough for him. Sensibility grew. Hot petals irritated. Suddenly she thought complaining—Not telling me much, he isn't; waiting for him; come on, come on.

"Come on. Let's hear about it. I'm thirsty."

"Thirsty?"

"Not in throat, silly. I want to hear—*hear;* what have you got to give me? You know I'm never satisfied? You know I never feel . . . saturated enough. *You* know it. I'm itching with curiosity. Come on. Here's the main-road. I shall stop and bite you again if you don't; I shall. You know I will."

"Come on a 'bus," he said.

"Why? Where?"

"Oh, does it matter? Anywhere."

They climbed a 'bus for Piccadilly, sitting almost alone on the top. She lay back and stretched out her legs. "My darling boy, you must tell me."

"Yes," he said with heavy breath. "Only into the back-streets, the quarters where the working-class lives. I was curious. No, I wasn't curious; I knew all along they had a

force in them that's more than what we've got . . . different in every quality to what we've got," he said, swaying his head. " Yes. Something tumescent, slow . . . like life itself, you see. Yes. M'm—wrapped up everywhere by our culture and ways of thinking. M'm—a potential thing and yet an existent thing."

" Embryo . . ." she said vaguely.

" Yes. Yes."

" Was that what you meant ? Oh. H'h. H'h—h'h." She laughed weakly. " How could I tell ? Embryo . . . that's the Masses ? The Revolution ? *I* didn't understand."

" Yes, you did. You did it instinctively."

" What ? Me ? P'raps you're right. Only you mustn't bully me ; I won't have it. But . . . here now, *they* understood. All three of 'em—I was watching their faces."

" Oh, they understood all right."

" Well ? Let's have some more."

He told her in a dried voice, begging her to understand why he'd gone out. She made no comment for awhile. He almost thought her asleep. He struggled to drain some liquidity into his words ; his organs wouldn't give it up. Merely absorbing what was sympathetic to her own pores she lay somnolent ; when she began to ask, the questions seemed to him erratic and childish. " Eh ? What colour were the bottles ? " " Did they shine ? " " Where did you smell that ? " He was irritated with this. " *How* many children ? " " *How* many people ? " Or queries that burst out of her own meditation— " Tell me, what's a boilermaker ? " " Tell me, didn't you see any red flags ? " " Tell me . . ."—till he saw she must be working on some research of her mind's own, not his at all. When he was silent to test this, she woke up breathing noisily, and said, " Yes ? Well ? . . ."

He begged her again to understand. " There's strength in them and it trickles through slowly to a man like me. I want it ; I'm admitting I want it. Is there some merit in that perhaps ? It's a night for confessions, and I might as well be naked and frank."

She didn't answer. At the Park she said, " Let's get off. I'm sick of this 'bus now ; it confines me "—and they left it and walked into the Park. Night had fallen.

The grass was thinly dewed. They loitered—world grew lacustrine. No wind—air crept upon the skin or did skin itself

creep ? Leaf-sediment was stirred, and at the same moments trees like water-weeds were overhead, were passed. Womb of London, where so many single tumidities have two soft voices, and the darkness groans and kisses are gone like gravel down black wells, here in the bedchamber of the very poor. They loitered on.

At last she let her hand touch his ; he gripped it tightly, feeling—" I have her now and here at any rate and for a moment." He brooded ; he saw he could think himself a conqueror. She said, " Have I been talking stupidly about you ? Was I not taking you seriously on the 'bus ? M'm ? You don't answer ; you must suppose so."

" No."

" You don't ? "

" No, my dear."

" You do. I don't blame you," said she, picking up leaves and tearing them and then searching for his hand again. " I'm an unhappy animal ; but then you're unhappy, too. I s'pose every one is, aren't they ? "

" Not necessarily."

" No ? Not unhappy ? Isn't it necessary that human beings should be unhappy ? Don't you think so ? "

" Why ? "

" Because it's so difficult to be human . . . ? No ? You don't think so ? I don't know. See, I don't feel I'm looking for the same things as you, and you mustn't blame me, and this you've told me—somehow——" Her hand began to twitch ; she caught it away.

" What ? " he said. " What is it ? "

" Nothing. Leave me alone. Go on talking about the streets ; or don't. No, don't. Better not." She began to hurry, saying under her breath—" See, I've been disappointed before. See ? *You*'ve disappointed me before ; it's not your fault. . . . If you don't know what I'm looking for, and I don't believe it exists anyway, it's better not to tell me."

" What is it you want, my dear ? "

She slowed and gulped and said, after a moment, " You can put your arm round me if you want to. Why don't you ? "

He did so. He took almost surly right of body in darkness, still possessed by that sense of conquest, and gradually aware of the hirsute and pendulous wrath brooding in himself. Who

was near ? Who was cognisant ? In a blind pit of creeping air he took her and found she yielded—felt for her lips indignantly, and met them as angry as his own. They drew away scarred mouths and returned and drew away. Roughly, their bodies began to heave ; his eyes were set in a frown. They went on ; under trees they stopped ; behind laurels they stopped where life fell dead—and while they kissed and stood letting ears suck dry the invisibility, there was less than sound. Distance alone stirred, old serpent head to tail. Hands lifted them—let fall, and into bodies that oozed and thickened with their own bitter frondage. They gave agonizing birth to their own bodies—pressed together—were pregnant with them till they were no more than flowers draining the world. She felt for the rusty railings and leaned against them trembling. He followed her ; he loosed one by one the buttons of her coat. They listened with lips together.

Mouths fluttered with thought—hers saying, " Here ? No, no," and his sullenly " Yes," and hers repeating " No . . . who can we ? " shaking away his tongue and then crying feebly, " I'm not going to have a baby just for this " ; and he answered.

" Here ? " said she, thrusting him from her face. " Good God ! you don't carry 'em about ? "

" I have to-day."

" And why ? You didn't foresee this. You couldn't. I won't *bear* you to. . . . You were planning—not for me."

" And if I wasn't," he said cruelly. " I have you now. Am I the only one that's thought like this ? " And he crushed her again and felt her lips pulp suddenly. Her limbs loosened—melted.

Time passed them by ; how long, they did not know. Who knows ever, in such a life beyond life ?

It was still night ; sea had drawn away from them. They were disconsolate in silence—he leaning back against the same railings, and she seated upon his coat—separately dumb. She said rubbing cheek on shoulder, " Yes. But for all that I'm never satisfied. Tell me—am I mad ? Or tell me—is all I do a pretence for something I can't find ? You know . . . or don't you know ? . . . that I only behave as I do 'cause I'm so starved. It's greediness for feeling that makes me so furious with them ; or tell me—do you hate me to goad them up like that ? Is it sickening to you ? What are you thinking now ? "

" Nothing."

" Is it about me ? "

" No, love. Not about you ; I want to have you home."

" *Your* thoughts first," she said.

" About that child . . ."

" What child ? " she said.

" Irene's child."

" M'm. Oh, but why ? It's happy enough."

" Now it is. Life is going to be a great shock to it . . . even if half my sense of the inevitable is true. I wouldn't like it hurt."

" H'h. There are plenty hurt," she said. " I'd have no pity ; and you . . . why don't you prepare its mind ? That's the best thing to do against shock."

He brooded and said, " Even now they imagine I'd poison its soul against them."

" You're too soft."

" It'll suffer . . ."

" Christ, we all have to suffer," she cried. " There's no paradise for babies and there *can't* be ; they've got to face life just as you've got to. Even if it means horrifying their mothers and fathers."

He made no answer. He moved uneasily against the railings.

" You ? " she said. " What was it *you* were telling me ? These streets—these people you've been with, have they really something, d'you think . . . they could give me ? Or am I only mad ? "

" You ? "

" Yes, me. Why not ? " she said, angrily. " Are you the only one ? I want . . ."

" What ? "

" I want my body, I tell you I'm starved. Half my body never has any feeling in it at all ; it lies aching for some. It's raw . . . *this* is all right—what we did just now ; but I want much more, and not that alone ; something that's the best of what we did, only spread out into a deep, unending laziness that's energy at the same time. . . . I don't know how. If you laugh at me, I'll never see you again. It's like an enormous . . . cloak I imagine it, always hot, always coloured." Her voice compressed to silence. She said after a while, " Yes ? These streets have something of it p'raps ? Or, if they haven't, then they have the feeling of a revolution . . . m'm ? They

can give me that? Bullets and scythes and fire to belch away all this gutless crowd and sweep 'em off the earth? Yes?"

"Sweetheart," he said painfully, "it's not like that, you see; the Masses are not like that."

"It *is*."

"No. No, it isn't. We are like that—troubled souls in our Class. I think you can hardly see in them the ghost of a longing for destruction; I . . . feel there is such creation in them, that when they come to destroy, it'll be like brushing aside. They'll brush aside with a terrible violence," he said quivering in the air, "and everything that gets in their way; but they're so calm, so kind."

She didn't speak. She stood slowly up and they went home across the Park.

Next morning he was ecstatic; and when their alarum-clock rang, he leaped out of bed like a goat stretching himself into the cold air. It was Saturday. Reborn, he hummed and was hungry. In the bathroom he stripped lather from his cheeks and becoming wholly goat stood in his tepid bath watching the shy hairs on his body start and stream under each deluge. The bath itself was a fresh doorway into the world where he would rediscover her. Later, dipping a cold spoon into hot porridge, he thought of his morning in the city as again only a fresh doorway to her, and sighed across the table; she was peeping into the tea-pot. His flat and his week-end became two equally crystalline spheres and gently coincided with one another; they were a single sphere; they held him suspended, intent upon all her movements.

When he reached home at midday, she was still out—ten minutes or more—and came up with an armful of Michaelmas daisies. He'd bought a present for her, brown-paper parcel; it was a little grey clouded bowl. She stood looking at it vaguely for a while and thanked him and turned her eyes about. "What?" he said.

"I'm . . . wondering where to put it. I don't know." In the end she left it where it was, unplaced upon her writing-table; Mrs Lamb cleared away the brown paper and string. They kept to their flat through the afternoon and had tea there—sat on during the twilight and so never quitted it at all. He was content; with such echoes and reminiscences as drifted in from beyond this sphere of his, he merely thought—

" After this week-end. After this week-end." He postponed everything.

He saw that she was idle but unquiet ; her eyes roamed and her mind roamed further. When he touched her or she caught his gaze, she appreciated it by curving her shoulders, as to a fire ; and said little. As the afternoon drew on, she suddenly fetched her paints and an earthenware bowl and mixed on her palette a lively orange. She glanced at him. " It's rather a . . . strong colour for such a small pot ; but I can't help it. This is the biggest I've got." She irritated a brush into orange—kept meeting his eyes.

" What are you doing it for ? " said he after a silence.

" Oh . . . Rachel, you know ; she'll take pretty well anything I bring her."

" It would look quite charming here ; keep it here . . . in the flat."

" M'm ? Here ? " she said peevishly. " Whereabouts ? You've got one or two of mine here already—that mauve and the dark green." She stopped painting and leaned back. He sat there, feeling that the integument of his week-end had just torn across. He sighed. He turned his eyes ; the little grey bowl he'd given her was still on her writing-table, loose and unabsorbed. What was it then she wanted ? Anything he could give her ? *He* had longed for a moment's rest in those caverns of thought where shape and colour thinly live on. He was exhausted with effort and self-drainage. What was it she wanted ?

He sucked his pipe. She took up her brush again. After a minute she said, " Are you sure they won't destroy ? "

" Who ? "

" The Masses, of course. What you were telling me in the Park."

" Oh. Destroy ? No," he said. " No, they don't destroy by nature. They're almost too complacent. They're kind-hearted, but . . . there's bound to be some damage and shooting in a revolution, but . . . *they* usually start after the others have begun it, and they forgive too much."

" You're sure ? It disappoints me. See now, they must destroy ; you can't have garden-parties and top-hats."

" What ? " he said plaintively. " Such things, they disappear, you see ; I imagine they're almost washed away in the night and the new system everywhere fills up their place.

It's like a sea-change. Fools that resist get hurt, of course, but . . . my dear, what's all this talk about destruction ? Do rest a while. Life and pleasure," said he wearily, " isn't all made up of hatred—or even much of it. D'you think so ? "

" *You* hate 'em, too."

" Yes, I feel bitter with them when they patronize the working-class. Yes. I've got this lust in me—but I want quiet as well and something to contemplate."

" Good ! I wish you'd show me."

He shifted—" My dear. That little pot you're colouring . . . m'm ? "

" Eh ? This means belch of colour ? Does *this* satisfy you ? I'm sick of it already ; it's just mocking at me."

" It'll go somewhere."

" And damn good thing, too. I see this painting's no relief to me ; it's a weak notion—one might as well blow bubbles. I want something I can spread on."

" Yes. But then this pot'll be a morsel of beauty. Won't it ? One hopes there are fragments that will be more or less perpetual. Yes ? "

" Perpetual ? " said she angrily. " What do you mean by perpetual ? This here ? This *really* satisfies you ? You don't understand. . . . Well, now look, I care about so much for it ; " and she slipped off her chair with the orange pot and cracked it suddenly against the edge of the fender. Its whole lip fell into the grate. They sat dumb escaping each other's eyes.

His own mind cracked with horror and slowly reorganized. She'd torn from him every thin memory of loveliness that he still hugged to him—sheltering out of empty despair. Gaps yawned. A phrase of the Pavane woke in him—the dead child that was himself—processional to darkness. What was it she wanted ? " I don't know what you want."

" No ? "

Through those opening gaps she drove him but with a new compulsion ; she could not let him rest.

" You know," he said after silence, " that I am feeling I must go out again . . . into the streets."

" Of course. You don't s'pose I'd keep you in. You've *got* to go."

" Oh. You want that ? "

" Want ? You're always bothering about what I want." She bent forward to the fire. " I b'lieve you mean it, dear; I'm not

pretending you don't truly mean it. Oh, yes. But . . . I can't tell you. It's a sad world. Remember I'm famished for life. It mayn't be any good, but let me hear all you do ; don't hide the silliest fragments ; see, I want to know what you do." She yawned over the fire. " To-night ? "

" What ? "

" Are you going to-night ? "

" No, no. To-morrow perhaps, or Monday. Monday."

" I shan't run away again . . . not for a bit."

They said no more ; and Mrs Lamb came in with their tea and saw the broken bowl there in the grate. She clicked her tongue over it, " T't, t't " ; and then, " However did you do it, Miss ? That's a pity." She removed it, swept a few petals from the mantelpiece and peered heavily round the room. " H'h'm. Now I think you're straight again, Miss, for a time." She left them sitting. They had tea.

On his 'bus when Monday came, he felt it all very abnormal —but there was no way out ; and he spread his sensations over the whole face of the streets and meditated that the times were quite abnormal. He glanced at posters outside the shops of newsagents ; they did not sustain this. It was a thankless task projecting the wealth of his inner consciousness upon a stolid universe. He closed his eyes and by concentration achieved it.

Yesterday afternoon they'd strolled out ; leaves swept over the Park palings—he kissed her behind a yew hedge. In front gardens as they returned were a few late dahlias and nasturtiums. They had made him more unhappy—he now wondered why. Across the inviolable breadth of one cold garden had walked a Persian cat, huge, white and emasculate, pacing slowly ; the smell of tea-cakes came from kitchens half below ground. Each garden compassed with its low wall, iron railings, laurel hedge—they purred internally with satisfaction and one felt the kettles purr on kitchen ranges, waiting for parlour-maids to handle them into silver Sunday teapots ; and milk for the white Persian on a hearthrug. Who would dare to intrude upon all this ? And again he took refuge in thinking—well, the times are quite abnormal ; and he left it at that.

King William Street at midday with flapping doors and quick, staccato voices—the sound of streams about the Exchange—were *these* abnormal times under the keen air ?

The crowds thread and interthread while he stands a moment watching, as on a stage. Ah, but he knows a ghost. He has heard a voice speaking from the underworld, on whose back all this rests. He walked away ; and, as he went, a figure he also knew met him—and they recognized each other—his father.

" Hullo," said Mr Brabant.

" Hullo," said Hugh, and they shook hands with warmth, looking seriously at one another. It was a meeting of bowler hats, nothing more ; they were indistinguishable from a hundred such meetings ; the City stamped them and they were thankful for it.

" Eh ? " said Mr Brabant. " Yes, yes. A Board Meeting." His smile widened quietly and engulfed his son. " Another sitting at 3.0. I thought of lunching at Cromin's. You'll come along, too ? " He nodded and raising himself was three inches taller than his son ; his rolled umbrella lay like a sheathed pure blade under his left arm. Hugh knew there must be many such Board Meetings—frequent visitations to King William Street—but he was never made privy to them. Mr Brabant came and flitted without a sign. He prearranged no luncheons. He never imagined himself doing so.

He turned by his son's side, his big head nodding slightly and solemnly ; Hugh found an arm, that from time to time quivered, had been slipped generously beneath his.

" We've been putting it across old Harrop," said his father brightly. " Chasing him round and holding him by his tail. You know they put Harrop on ? The North British Lion and Glasgow Mutual . . . that's where I've been this morning."

" Harrop ? You mean . . . ? "

" Old puggy-whiskered Harrop. Honourable Viscount Harrop, K.C.M.G., M.V.O., D.S.O., and so on, of Coddlebourne and Armenteers . . . that's him. One of our guinea-pigs. Though between you and me, 'tis more because of the breweries that they scooped him in. Oh, yes, he's part of the Harrop Beer-works. Half the times you go into a pub, you're dropping something into the pockets of old puggy-whiskers to buy him a new sword or pair of spurs."

Hugh half understood the arm—a lonely man, fresh from conflict with men, groping for intimacy. He began, " But why do you let him have a say ? Only a guinea-pig, isn't he ? "

" Eh ? Bless you, when they *do* get lively, they need a lot of catching. Oh, yes. Puggy-whiskers of Armenteers, for

example, imagines a Board Meeting is a new edition of a Council of War. Terrible fellow. How are you keeping? Fit?"

"Very, thanks. And you?"

"Yes . . . yes. Devilish chill it's getting, don't you find? I don't fancy the journey down to-night, damned if I do. Here we are." He pressed his son's arm and, releasing it, pushed through the swing-doors. His features grew very sober; with jaw thrust gravely out, he peered round under the brim of his bowler; his pose was almost nervous—almost coy. "There's a table," he said mysteriously over his shoulder and led the way. Hugh followed—guiltily to the feast, wishing anything but this. The abnormal times that pulsed in his own blood fell hopelessly back from that unspeakably normal pair of saddened eyes. . . . Irene he could face—Grimball; but this was impossible. They were of different elements, utterly disconnected worlds. Here was a ghost.

## CHAPTER TEN

SEATED, he gazed at the white hair and said: "Mother keeping well?"

Mr Brabant found the opening inconvenient; he did not hear it. He looked up a moment later, put his elbows on the table and said: "Well . . . how's business?"

The tone was set; the waiter understood. Hugh replied, humbly. He began. "Oh, so-so. . . ." He brought it out in long jerks. Somewhere in his mind a corner had co-ordinated scraps of figures, tables, rumour. He didn't feel easy, but he could talk.

"D'you see Scrubbs?" said his father. "And what is the name of the other fellow with him? Pentlow. The nosey one."

Hugh knew them. His father listened, commented suitably, fingered his glass. He fixed Hugh with pallid eyes. "Well? Shall we drink?" He lifted his arm, nodding gently.

"Best o' luck," murmured Hugh. They drank. The bubbles of inspiration, reorganizing the surface of their minds, kept them silent for a moment. They looked towards one another

gravely. The relationship that Mr Brabant demanded was modestly secure—on a commercial basis. The time had come.

" How," said Hugh, " is every one at home ? "

" M'm ? Yes, they're all very flourishing. Yes. My wife. . . ." He paused and stared at his son attentively. " *Your mother*," he said, " had a touch of rheumatism last week."

" Yes. I had a card from her."

" Eh ? H'm. Oh. Mildred is . . . very well, I think. Your mother fancied she heard someone in the garden the other night. Creeping about on the lawn. Eh ? No, no. Of course not. I've a 'phone in the bedroom . . . could get through to the bobbies in two minutes. Nothing to pinch out there. Thing would be to have a notice up ' Beware of the alligators ' ; Mr Sikes is shy of uncatalogued reptiles . . . thinks they wander loose at nights. It's all your sister's fault," said his father, confidentially. " She's told her some yarn about a fellow that tried to pick your pocket or knock someone down on the road. I don't know. Did he ? "

He spoke on across his *entrecôte ;* his talk browsed lonely through the fields of human behaviour—now domestic, now remote from him—meditating his species as if it were the lowest of the animals. He didn't condemn it ; he was surprised at it. These pageantries, these strange antipathies, fevers of senseless expenditure !

" *You* think so, don't you ? " he said more than once, gazing under lowered brows. " That's your opinion, too ? "

Traversing it all, decent and regular as the migration of birds, flowed and reflowed the currents of Credit and Exchange. He breathed calmly of these ; all else was unimaginable froth, gross by-product of men's thought. He bent kindly towards his son.

" I say, you remember old whisky-liver, that fellow who came to lunch on Sunday. What's his name ? Grimstools. Grimpills."

" Grimball. . . . M'm ? "

" He's turned up again. In writing this time. Thank the Lord, not in person. He sent me along a post card of some memorial or other they've stuck up in a church near him. Eh ? Oh, I don't know anything about that kind of stuff. Apparently it's a nude female. Mildred sees some reason to like it ; Lucia doesn't. Eh ? Old whisky-liver wants to get it removed. But I told him he couldn't. . . . You know, you

can't do that sort of thing," explained Mr Brabant, in a shocked voice. " The syndicate that subscribed towards it are satisfied that the Johnnie has carried out his contract, and the parson has given permission to stick it up. Grimball told me so himself. He's no earthly foot to stand on."

" I never knew *you* supported the artists," said Hugh, faintly amused.

" Bless you, it's nothing to do with the artists. It's a matter of contract and right of possession. For all I care, the syndicate could set it up for a cockshy. Perfect right to. Remember when the soap-boiler—what's his name—had a picture done of himself and then cut the head out. Remember it ? The art students went out and paraded round his house, didn't they ? The soap-boiler was quite within his rights. He'd paid and entered into possession. No. No. You can't do *that* sort of thing." He examined his son's face. " I'm glad you had the sense not to go in for a colonel's job during the War. I always thought so. It's a gloomy fate."

They ate in silence. Again the old man spoke, with a large sigh. " Yes. You remember what I said the other day . . ."

" M'm ? "

" What I said the other day. They've never quite forgiven you for not taking a commission in the War. Your sister seems the kind of girl who likes a bit of show, tin skewer and top-boots —what ? I should humour 'em."

" Oh, well."

" Quiet's a good thing," said his father. " You'll find that. Yes. A little business lunch like this seems as comfortable a spot as one'll reach in life. I'd humour 'em."

He said, huskily : " I don't think Irene and I ever got on well together."

" Oh, quite. I quite agree with you, my dear fellow . . ."

" And there's so many matters now on which we differ—on religion, y'know, and business . . . h'm."

" What ? "

" I said, on religion and business and . . . human problems, y'know."

" Oh ? Oh, yes. H'h . . . but, as a matter of fact "—he dropped his voice—" they're after me in exactly the same way. Only you invite it more. Eh ? You think so, don't you ? " He paused and seemed about to ask a question ; he laid palms flat on the table—and then drew them away. His eyes

wandered. " Yes, you always have disagreed. That's very true. Perhaps that's at the root of it."

" I can't re-act my whole life. I'm sorry. . . ."

" My dear chap, I'm not blaming you ; it's no concern of mine. But I'm wondering why it is, if you don't hit it off, you should. . . ." His voice drowsed ; his eyes faded to the doorway. " M'm . . . yes. I should go gently with them. For example, your mother dislikes this picture old Grimpills sent along. Well—let it be ; say it's done by a Hun or a Bolshevik or that sort. It doesn't matter."

" Yes." Hugh ate quickly ; his knees beneath the table were suddenly shivering. He couldn't say more.

" You coming down again to Surrey ? " said his father.

" Well," said Hugh huskily, " there was some suggestion of the last part of November for a week-end."

" Did you accept ? "

" Yes."

Mr Brabant, following a fly sadly with his eyes, made no comment. Their plates were removed.

A phrase or so ventured at intervals, carried the meal through its last weak pulsations. Mr Brabant had something on his mind. Rising at the end, as though he rose unintentionally, he hesitated and smiled ; he took Hugh's coat from the waiter and embraced him in it, smoothing it round the shoulders. Outside the swing-doors he stopped dead and began to handle his pipe. There was suspension.

" What are you going to do till your meeting ? " said his son ; and felt he had intruded.

" I don't know," said Mr Brabant, filling thoughtfully. " Take a walk, I expect. Down to the Embankment to look at the seagulls . . . or to the Tower and back." He struck a match.

" I suppose you drop up sometimes to the Mercantile and General," said Hugh after the pause.

Mr Brabant's eyes and eyebrows rose towards him. " Me ? Bless you, no. Haven't been into the offices for years. They don't want me messing round up there. I never go near the place except for a Board Meeting." Again he appeared to hesitate. They stood there. He emitted a cloud of smoke. " So you're . . . coming down to Surrey in November ? "

" That was the arrangement."

" Yes. Yes. I . . . er . . . wonder why you have an

inclination to come down there." He saw his son's face. "Of course, I want you to look upon it as a home whenever you care to," he said, with a tiny bow. "You must do just as you desire. I only wondered why . . . er . . . I don't want you to feel there are any restrictions on you. Loose ends and sense of duty are . . . er . . . likely to limit one's outlook. I mean, climbing up at Lloyd's is a slow job. What I mean is, you don't have many flutters with your income. No, no; of course not. You can't. I can let you have some more, if you care. Two or three hundred more. I can put you on to some very good things. You don't want to keep outside till I pop it. Makes life so devilishly uninteresting."

"But you have already . . .," said Hugh dully. "I've already . . ."

"Oh, yes, yes. I know. But you've got that tied up in fairly safe securities. Very wise of you." He brushed it aside. "I mean, you must be wanting to find your depths properly. Speculate a little on your own. You've a good opportunity for scoring points. . . . Good as I ever had. Better. I fancy I can touch a good thing or two, when you care for it. . . . M'm?" He took his pipe in a faintly quivering hand and bent towards Hugh. "This is just between us two. We'll fix something up. Life's a tedious affair anyway; no need to make it worse than it is." He nodded kindly. "You don't worry yourself much about these damned novels and theatres, do you? I can't stick 'em. Can't see what people go to plays for and sit in a devilish draught while some manager yowls up an' down the stage or Lottie Longstockings prances round. What *do* you. . . . H'm? What *do* you do with your time?" He gazed stiffly.

"Oh, I don't know. With my time? I read a bit or drop into a club perhaps—or go and hear some music."

"M'm. Quite so. Well, I'm glad, but what I mean is, my dear chap, one soon grows tired of that kind of thing. You'll find you do," he said, his hands quivering slightly. "Yes. You can get further afield with a little money in hand. It's damnable being at a loose end; it's painful. Look here, we'll just think on about that idea of yours. We won't delay over it. I think it's a good one."

"Yes, yes. I must. Thank you, though I know you want no thanks. I'll write—in a day or so. I must talk to Eve; it's a little unexpected still."

" Eh ? How d'y'mean ? You've no objection to it ? "

" No, no. No. It's amazingly kind of you. But . . . Eve, you know, ought to give her opinion.' '

His father blinked at him. " Very well. I'll wait for you to write." He paused and suddenly there was a pit in time, while his mouth dropped and his eyes probed into the young man's face ; dreadful apprehension looked as through water, fish-like or reptilian. He sighed deeply ; he seemed unaware. " Well, you must be padding it back ; I'll walk with you so far." He turned down the pavement. No hint of his next visitation or of a further luncheon appeared to cross his mind ; it was not Mr Brabant's way. Again he slipped a hand under his son's arm and walked with him, humming quite out of time with their footsteps.

By four o'clock Hugh had passed through many moods. His eyes and fingers stretched out into telephone-calls, dictation and the urgency of forms. " With reference to yours of the 26th inst.," he drawled, " we deeply regret . . .," staring at the little clock upon his desk. These times were abnormal —but what hope of solution, when spirits like that old man could come to meet one in King William Street ? Why did he so fear his father ?—he couldn't tell, unless it was that the bewilderment of his whole Class had gathered into those speculative eyes and looked out sourly at him. Lines sharpened; his future became a flow of dark consequences. Seeing his father, he saw too, that family of his—and dim and dimmer shadows of the family ; and was conscious that he'd revealed his hand to them. One grows cold, shuts the window. Class-war lay now in their midst like a fertilized egg. Would they forgive ? He had shown to them the unspeakable, the unatoneable.

So it went on ; and of Eve he scarcely thought ; she was a natural phenomenon. He had begun to carry her with him incorporate in his limbs like atmosphere. From that moment he seemed to struggle on alone. His father—Eve would never understand what he felt about his father. Her language had no words for it. His father—he was very clear on that last duologue at the pavement's edge. He felt, almost in his own organism, the tenuous nerves that faintly creeping had warned the old man into speech. " Don't tell me," the eyes had said. " Don't breathe a syllable. Don't come near me. Be as I am —cease to distinguish yourself from me by a single thought.

Let me mould you with my lavishness, freely given—gladly given, as I moulded you into your great coat. Only don't tell me;" and all this far below the old man's comprehension.

Against so strange and intestinal a fear, he sat helpless. Which of the world's reeking streets can comfort him again? The wells of the proletariat drew away.

Yet, when he left the office, he was in a 'bus, and moving hastily not towards his home but away from it; and this because there was nothing else to be done. Existence had to go on. In a few minutes the streets received him. He walked along down a little hill, his stick under his arm and his hands in his pockets, very slowly. He thought of the adenoidal boy in Number 21—not far from here—and was apprehensive. How many days since? It seemed a century, but only four days. It was too soon to return; he must endure a little. He woke up to one smell after another, an accent that drifted by him and the gait of women; they were the old ones; they found contact with his sleepy nerve-endings and he began to raise his head, to breathe. Down the hill he went. He was an amphibian now, sinking into its second element. Odours and sound were no longer new; they were old. He and they had become one, were acclimatized.

Darkness drew over, melting men and women into doorways, and the lamps were lighted. So much the same as ever. He walked, meditating on paving-stones and cobbles. His self-consciousness dissolved under the watery light into sensation; and when he heard seated voices under a sudden arch, he paused before he knew. Beyond the narrow arch was a yard with one light; under the arch were figures and a soft clink of coin. The voices, too, paused. He scarcely knew how long he had stood there. Then the blood ran to his head. He thought of pushing past them with an excuse. Quick whispers had told him they recognized his style, thought him harmless, mad maybe—but that pulses had tightened dangerously; and then one length of human shape had uncoiled itself and come forward upright, with a wriggling motion, supported from behind by a wind of forgotten voices. This comfortable drawing-room creature stood here made flesh before them, helpless and intrusive. That was all they knew. That he saw in a flash—and a greasy cap pulled low to one side, a tuft of dark hair, opened coat and the gleam of a

snake-clasp on a studded belt. He had heard of such things happening.

"Want anything? Hey?" The thick-nosed features were close to his; then drew suddenly back, and a chest was thrust against his overcoat and flurried it to and fro, retreated—came on again. The wind of voices rose and fell. "Do anything for you? Don't be afraid of arsk-ing. Hey?"

"A mistake. Absolutely a mistake. I don't know this district."

"Oh, do pray let us have the pleas-ure of direct-ing you. Won't you kindly bloody well go to hell? Oh, pray do, Majah."

Hugh heard the laughter. To move quietly—that was the only thing; but he delayed, rigid, tracing little patterns with his stick upon the pavement. He recalled these patterns later; they were the clearest thing of all.

"I understand you," he was saying hoarsely. "I shall go off if you want to belt me. I shall go damn quick. But I don't mean any harm; it was only an accident. . . ."

"Accident, hell," said the young man spitting. "Nosing round. Huh. No haahm in shoving your bloody conk in here like a bloody copper. Only an arks-ident, I do ass-ure you, my deah sir. Go'ern. . . . Makes you bloody well spew." He rolled his shoulders strangely towards Hugh, and the voices rose; but there was disquietude. Even as he came he glanced down the alley. The conscience of his class is imposed upon it and overtakes it out of twilit corners—heavy feet and gleaming buttons.

"I'm going," said Hugh, breathlessly. "Really, it's no concern of mine."

The thick nose snorted at him. "Let's see your back then." They were both panting hard. The archway was silent. "I . . . I don't mean *you* no harm," said the young man, suddenly; his shoulders weakened and dropped. "If I thought, of course . . ." This farewell, this departure of the unknown into the unknown, softened all things; he was hesitant. "Fact is, you give us a start. Don't s'pose you *do* mean anything. I wouldn't have belted you. Course I wouldn't." The tones settled down to a reassuring contempt. "Only what can a bloke do? A'right for you—what cheer for a quiet hand at vignty or poker in the back drawing-room at a bob a card. Then when the season comes round, toodle-oo for

Monte Carlo. See ? It's different for us. It's the cop for us. See ? It's different." He straddled his legs and rubbed his hands together.

"I know. . . . I know. Good night."

"Good night, old cock." Released under the dark archway out came the laughter-belch, and the suppressing whispers almost in one breath. His footsteps clattered ; he heard them, —voices, a burst of laughter carelessly spraying him. He did not worry ; almost then he had forgotten—and only resignation stayed and one vast bubble of pain that, at intervals appearing, dropped suddenly from top to bottom of his life. So it must be. Again, he had yielded himself a victim for his whole class ; he had seen—as his class, if it is to have perfect vision, must always see the exploited—across a ghostly barricade.

He walked among children and grew calm. Their hands, their necks and hair made him drunk with pleasure. They fluttered past him, across him, into him ; he did not exist. They caught at the skirts of his coat, hiding from one another, as though he were a bush of loose branches ; he became himself for awhile ghostly ; abuse would drift through him and even stones and mud. They twined everywhere ; the cobbles seemed to luxuriate with children and bring them forth. The houses above him, ten minutes ago there might have been no children here, only two or three score of bodies that toiled without surprise, and then a burst of fertility and still the bodies, toiling without surprise, and the dumb, undying houses. Thus are they born. In such a stream and through such a silence ; no one turns a head to look ; they seem intermingled like a commune of water-drops from their very sources. Not one seems distinguishable even by a manger ; and when they die, they die together upon a forest of crosses.

He felt them touch him with delight. A box on wheels was dragged along, leaping from peak to peak. The very pavements were their cold playthings, marked out in squares of chalk. For one moment he paused to watch a curly-haired girl—six or less—that bounced a ball interminably against a house, just under a gas-lamp that flickered at it, and off like the turn of a fish—marvellous ; catching it after one bounce, after two. She was counting in a faint chirrup. She suddenly saw him and they both blushed, but she twisted an eye back to him and then they laughed. He found no words.

A late-working factory breathed up and down wheezily, as

lungs lifting a weight of water ; there was no sign of what it did. One wheel turned visibly through the high window, its upper segment showing dark against the ceiling ; with each rotation the dim light flickered across it and off, like the gleam of an interminably tossing ball. He could not even guess at it. He vaguely understood the internal combustion engine—vaguely, peering into the bellies of so many automobiles ; machinery as a whole had descended to him through the generations, an utterly alien heritage. He knew it in a moment—life was growing transparent—that he sucked at these vast paps and was terrified at them ; that he eyed them as a child eyes a mechanical toy ; that he could no more survive without them than he dared face them. He and his had sold the birthright of their age . . . and to whom ? A human in soiled dungarees open at the throat flung ajar a half-doorway and for a fraction took in the street. He breathed with hands on hips and Hugh had passed beyond him.

He ate meat sandwiches in a saloon bar while they came and left ; the night air flushed in and was nipped short ; the till chimed. He spoke to no one. He sat brooding ; his pores seemed to open delicately and of themselves absorb a world grown moist and warm around him. Voices, sounds and odours dissolved into meaning. He was aware . . . and before they had been blunt and repellent ; each had struck upon him with a cruel flatness. Now he was at home. He drank and ate slowly ; and when a street-singer came in with his cap, he took out a sixpence ; and even as he dropped it in, saw himself again on the table before him, naked but without pain. That sixpence was his purchase price and blood-offering—all he had to give. He looked back ; how often in the past had that same hand gone to the same pocket, even when with shame it crept away. The boilermaker on the lonely road—the child he had stumbled over—the flute-player—and the vendor from whom he had bought a bottle—and the seated man upon the dark Embankment. Those very boys gambling under the archway, he had longed to grasp a handful of coins and say : " Take these. Play with these. Flourish, what you can." Yes, yes—so it was. Nothing can I give you, but silver and gold have I. A thin exchange and all because he had something that tinkled and rolled and spun. He knew that he was only buying his escape a little longer, just a little longer—and precisely as his father yearned to buy it from *him*. He mused on this. He felt no pain.

Streets opened awhile and tenements fell away ; only here and there they dwelt. He saw them enter and the lights came up. Children had been sucked from the roadways. Warehouses piled themselves into the darkness ; and the streets, opening wide, divided about walled depots and yards. There was loneliness for acres. A power-station moaned high above him, as he passed it, like a mass of night-birds ; he heard the grind of heavy wheels down the further streets ; and turned at a door banging. He went to and fro, a wild animal ; each time he escaped the district, he was drawn back into it and once again lounged by the same gates, the same boards, the same smell of vacant lots. Work was going on. He could hear it and men would hurry past him singly or in couples. The high walls scraped his shoulders, as for the third time he encircled them ; the open gates were blunter than a high brick wall. A human drift began, unmistakeable and echoing, all one way like the tide of settling birds, a wheel in motion. Church clocks established an hour and the wheel speeded. He followed it slowly ; footsteps came up behind and passed. He reached a gate and lost them through it, and saw there—one fixed shadow on the wheel's edge, a figure that stood selling newspapers alone.

Some bought, some passed ; the figure stayed accosting. He eyed it hungrily as a cat might, crossed the road and walked furtively down the other side, palpitated in case it should move and leave an emptiness and the unpausing wheel. He wound out of sight of it, turned and came back still more slowly. He had no doubts. It was what he was seeking. Here —here by a chance was the skin of the proletariat drawn aside and its complex nerves quietly exposed. The shadow had not moved, the shadow of a nerve. The wheel still went past—decreasing and decreasing. There were fewer to see and hear ; the man was counting his last papers. He would vanish, a current flowing back to its ganglion when its privy work is over, the organism knitted — fed inaudibly.

Hugh came level. The figure glanced . . . no more ; beyond the shadow of the gates stood a policeman like a watching shadow ; between them they balanced the gateway and past them both had hurried all the footsteps. He paused ; the figure glanced again more rapidly. There was a white sweater up to the throat and a grey torn jacket over it, a bare

head with roughened light brown hair. New shapes came pattering out of the by-streets.

Five seconds were all he could give himself. " Er. . . . I'll have one."

" Eh ? "

" I'll have a paper," he said loudly. " How much ? "

Three men brushing him blotted all out, in words he could not catch and in the flutter of papers. He sank to nothingness. " Good night."

" 'Night." He saw the seller again as after a wave appearing.

" A paper," he said.

" Sorry. I've just sold the last one," said the brown-haired man, carelessly—and he had, too, a brown face, pointed cheek-bones and chin under the spluttering gas-lamp ; a little wind was rising. He stood a moment as if courteously there and jangled a weight of coppers in a trousers pocket viewing the night. " You can get one if you want it, you know where, I s'pose," he added abruptly, switching dark eyes direct into Hugh's face. His speech was very simple, as if he picked his words for modesty's sake ; but his eyes handled, dissected and catalogued Hugh ; he'd made up his mind.

" I don't know, as a matter of fact ; actually I'm not sure what. . . . Isn't it a working-class paper you're selling ? " He laughed stupidly.

" H'm. Well. . . ." He gave him details by rote, interested in them, but not in him, and viewed the sky. " Getting cold. Well, I must dodge off." He glanced at the policeman's back, was faintly surprised at Hugh's face and coat-buttons and turned away.

He was thirty paces gone, and Hugh ran after him. " Here, I say. I say." He stopped without comment ; his expression was just the same—brighter eyes if anything. " I haven't remembered quite all you said," murmured Hugh ; and almost truly ; he had forgotten every word.

The stranger was nearly kind ; maybe it was this lonelier wind and the lifting of the Law's pondus. " I see. Well. . . ." He repeated slowly. His voice spelt the syllables. " Got it now ? Shall I write it down ? "

" No. I shall remember. Thank you very much. I. . . . Of course, I know," said Hugh, tracing his patterns, " it's a bit suspicious for a man of my type to plunge in like this. I mean . . . I know that. But actually, you know, I'm not

just curious or anything of that kind." He swallowed. "I really am interested. Well, really, more than interest," explained Hugh, finding that the dark eyes ran with questions like a series of probes; he flushed. "I do take a kind of part. I mean I've quarrelled with my family, for example. That is, with several of them. I think it's impossible not to in these times. Frightfully difficult."

"You have?"

"Oh, yes. Constantly. I mean, there's so many problems . . . politically. Russia, of course. Well, you see I support Russia." His voice began to tremble; there was pathos in it. "And I feel I don't care how soon we follow. If it were tomorrow I'd give up everything for it."

"There are various people that feel that way."

"I get the sense," said Hugh, "that I'd be ready to work myself to death for it when it came. . . ." His voice was almost tearful; and he snapped off suddenly—and suspiciously. The words did not seem quite his. . . . They were an echo. He hung for a moment on the edge and then saw—a saloon bar, a fat small-nosed face with a homburg thrust back, the vendor of patent medicines. Hugh was ashamed. He hesitated and confessed. "I imagine I mean it, but perhaps after all one doesn't. It's easy for a fellow in my class to become sentimental."

"Yes, it is," said the stranger, patiently, and waited.

"Yes, it is." He hurried after phrases. "But these domestic crises are the devil. I suppose they're inevitable. I mean, I suppose they're to be expected. I say, I'm keeping you? Er . . . let me walk along a few yards. May I? I've nothing to do."

"Well, if you like," said the stranger, he was almost girlish. He tittered; but his pose, behind the titter, seemed to calculate a dozen chances and allow for them all. There was no one near. The growing gusts rattled a window-pane and creaked undecipherable loose fragments of metal above them. They were walking together in silence. The stranger's arms swung and Hugh felt his glances.

"Well . . . I'm going this way," he said suddenly.

"Yes. Oh, yes. Please. I've no choice of streets at all. And really, I don't want to come farther than you care. Please."

"H'm." They passed into the side-turning; a lifted news-

paper slid solemnly towards them and flapped. They went on together.

" I suppose there must be some solution," complained Hugh, tossing his head. " *I* don't know. People of my class don't seem to be wanted. Not really. That's my experience."

" Well, that depends."

" We don't seem to have much to offer, except a kind of romantic sympathy."

" I wouldn't say that," ventured the stranger, bashfully.

Hugh rushed into all his questions, and then he drew back apprehensive of some indistinguishably grim and callous core. He turned his eyes. He was sensible of coarseness in the dark skin as under a lamp shadows ran down it—and a jaunty gait with a half spring in it—and that the fellow was vaguely smiling all the time. At Hugh ? " No," he thought, " at his own secret images. He seems to revert to me only when courtesy demands an answer. I don't exist." But he had to enunciate or become altogether a spirit.

" Is it impossible, d'you suppose, to make people understand ? I mean my family. I can't explain quite in a moment ; but is it, as it were, *your* experience that some people are entirely obtuse to the meaning of events . . . rapid changes ? "

" Well, I think that's so, isn't it ? " Head thrust further forward and sudden slowing of walk ; he seemed really to observe Hugh ; there was a pause. " Y'see, when you come upon a revolutionary stage in historical development, any antagonisms already existing . . . see ? . . . personal and otherwise, tend to assume a class aspect. It's only natural. What you'd expect. See . . . if you quarrel with your brother p'raps over some private business, let's say money, or a girl, or something o' that sort, like often happens . . . then one of you is led *by* wanting to get the better, to take one side in the revolutionary struggle. Other takes the other side naturally. See ? Would do so, wouldn't he ? Y'see ? It gets coloured . . . see ? . . . by the historical and social atmosphere you happen to be living under."

" Oh, you think so ? "

" Why, yes, sure. Unless you and your brother . . . see ? for example . . . both find your economic interests so identical in the light of the new revolutionary situation, that you are driven to make up your quarrel, so to speak, which

provides the only other alternative in face of the objective situation."

"Yes."

"Take the other side." He'd slipped some lockgate in his mind and out it was tumbling; almost a new voice—faintly impatient, loamed up and hot with erudition, handling words as a packer handles porcelain, with amplitude; turning his head from time to time to look openly into the listening face. "You might have the economic interests of two parties—see? that had been on tolerably good terms before, touched in different and antagonistic ways by the rising of a revolutionary situation, and so making them enemies of one another before they know what hit them, as you might say. Then they'll start chipping about any damn thing—see what I mean? religion, or taste in books or just anything. Mind you, I wouldn't say that'd happen inside a family such as what you're talking about. That may be a different situation. That's more applicable to what I was telling you of just now. Take me?"

"Yes. Yes. You've absolutely touched the point. Takes the colour of the revolutionary period. Bound to do so because of course one can only express oneself after the fashion of one's own time. Yes."

"M'm. . . ."

"That's what you suggest about me?"

"Well . . . I s'pose so," confessed the stranger's lips with a titter. The lockgates had been dropped back. The flush was out;—and again Hugh ceased to exist. Only their footsteps as they turned another corner. Perhaps he ought to go.

Progression only—no pause or awakening. His throat and tongue refused to consummate the words that would break this off for ever. Progression only past fresh pubs, hoardings, the drift of newspapers, a policemen under arch, footsteps that faded into the dry putrescent lodging-places among these intestinal windings; and always towards some doorway that would close between them casually—or worse still, good night at the convenient twist in the streets. He rose out of their current despairingly and his opened mouth struggled fish-like with air.

"In my class a man is driven to . . . to people like you."

"To whom?"'

"To the proletariat. Out of one's own class. At least, out of unbroken communion with one's own class."

" Why ? "

" To . . . er . . . I'll try and express myself . . . to find some contact with vital force and endurance and constructiveness. To gain a little hope of human endeavour. To feel *some* revolutionary pulse. I mean, one gets the sense otherwise that all this—you understand—this threshing to and fro in search of relief and anodynes has to go on for ever. Agonizing thought."

" Well—there's other considerations." He seemed to fill slowly with air. " For example, what you said is what we term individualistic. That's to say, viewing the revolutionary movement from the position of the intelligentsia. You reflect the break-down of the system by realizing that the bourgeoisie in which you find yourself, is incapable of evolving new forms in literary and artistic expression—let alone scientific and organizational. That's how it seems to you. It's what you call vitality ; vitality is what you mean by stimulus to productive forms." His being had shifted to his throat ; it seemed to bulge with the burden ; he kept turning his head. " See what I mean ? You want to go back, saying, ' Here's art and literary power and creative energy. Here's the goods ; all you sterile bastards can go to hell ; I don't need you no longer.' But then there's the other point of view, and I don't want you to be disappointed ; but on the contrary keep on . . . go further a few paces. You can't touch tar without being stuck and filthed up by it ; and you can't touch the revolutionary movement long enough to get any use for yourself out of it without having to grow into it. Like roots growing into a flower-pot—see ? It don't give anything, not to anybody, without taking a what you might call pound of flesh right out of you. You got to learn that ; that's what I told you for, not to disappoint you ; because I should be surprised if you were easily disappointed."

Dumbness like the first enfolding of a great concavity that has no term till earth's centre ; the place where one cannot speak ; and even then Hugh was thinking—' Here at last I am breathing alongside one of them that acknowledges me, lets me touch his mind ; and yet there is something about him that puzzles me."

" Again, with regard to what you was saying," the stranger pursued him, " disagreements arising between you and your family about political issues and so forth. See what I mean ?

That's one of the things you can't take up one day and drop the next. Once you moved one pace, they'll force you to move the next; and then you'll force them to force you. Take it anywhere you like; take your establishment of Union organization in some factory or small shop; take your threat of strike action; take your local wage demand . . . or what *your* case is, introduction of class principles into private affairs. There's not one spot of difference in the working out of the situation. You'll have put up a challenge. They'll have had to answer that. You'll have had to say, ' Right; now they know I said it. They won't forget I've said it.' See what I mean? If they forget, it would be easy; but they don't forget . . . not ever. You got to look to that. It's not so simple, I know; but then you wouldn't have been looking for simple ways, to come up to me to-night."

He listened and did not listen. Struggling, he dared think no more than there is something—but what? and saw that the stranger's words came to him as across a bridge. He touched no shred or finger-nail of the proletariat; but by some unimaginable formula this creature had managed to stride between world and world, deciphered his problems, spoke in his tongue. What formula? Was this a wisdom of the future? And have the Masses already such tongues? And yet a skin eternally divided them, sullen as that between born and unborn; it was as though a fœtus prophesied.

They had stopped at a lane's corner. The young white-sweatered man was loosely gazing at him, holding out a loose brown hand. " Well—I'll have to get along here. I'll bid you good night. I'm pretty often selling papers on Friday evening at the same place. Well . . . good night."

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

THERE was a plateau in time, five weeks or more; high and gasping air but no event, because he could not endure there should be. Eve he thought going mad. She appeared like a face through water—again and again. Day followed night and

night day ; he saw her against white sheets, questioning or sleeping—in the orange-shaded tank of light, their drawing-room—cold on walks—under pink shades, purple shades, street-lamps.

" . . . Why are you twisting your fingers together ? " he said. " Have you been here all this evening ? Done nothing ? Not read ? Painted ? What are you doing with your hands ? "

" What *am* I doing with them ? I haven't noticed ; I don't want to notice. All day I've been at Rachel's . . . all yesterday. I went out half an hour after you. The flat turns my stomach up. All Wednesday at Rose Woolley's studio. . . . They mean nothing and I'm lonely."

" In the daytime I can't be with you ; you know I can't. How could I ? And we've had evenings together, some evenings, and week-ends. You told me to go out."

" You must go out," she answered. " You must go out more. Why are you back so early to-night ? Haven't you anything to tell me ? I shall go as a model. I shall have photographs of myself in the nude. My clothes make me itch ; you have your business all day, and why shouldn't I ? They'd take me on ; Rachel knows lots of 'em. Lipper or Polski would be glad to. . . . These clothes are terrible, terrible. I want to tear them. I want to stand and *feel* as though they were painting me all over—as though my body were the canvas and drinking in the soft colour. Haven't you anything to tell me ? "

" This is your affair. *I* don't want to restrict you. I suppose in the daytime you *are* lonely. . . . Let me think. I can't blame you for it."

" Yes, you can," she cried. " You should. It's your nature to do so. You're driving me mad. D'you know I was happiest when I was smashing that pot the other day. Really happy. Aren't you shocked ? Don't look at me. I can't bear your eyes ; they're putting these clothes on me. Sit down ; sit down there with your back to me . . . half your back . . . and tell me what's happened to you."

The singing of groups outside closed public bars, when the lights within had glimmered and gone out. He looked for it, and looked for eleven o'clock's—" Time, please. Time "—and returned to places where he had heard it. Now and then it came. The hoardings were suddenly white and red and yellow for the Municipal Elections ; he passed from name to

name, his skin crawling at them all alike and at their promises. This wasn't the thing at all. They sprouted out, vulgarly spurring on the dumb submissive multitudes into hopes they never hoped and belief they could not believe. So insolent, so dry with repetition. The singing rose up out of cold streets a block away, melodies he often did not know—indistinguishable words, a sea beyond time, each note sadly resigned because so lovely a thing must be its own dirge. Their songs are a valley in the middle of bondage ; they linger in them. He felt it. Only once young Jews, five or six of them, parading away arm-in-arm down the pavement jostled him ; their faces shone, they wore badges in button-holes. A little farther swiftly they started up with a clip-clap of their shining footsteps. " Mary had a little lamb . . . hi ! . . . shouting out the battle-cry of freedom ; " and round the enlivened corner all in time.

At the Lime-tree Club waiting for Eve he sat, fixed over a cup of coffee that steamed. This was the most select of all—almost the latest. The refuge of ourselves alone, now that all the others have been invaded by the mere Bohemians, money and even a dinner-jacket, strained commercialists thrilling at the word Cabaret, or to a chance-caught Polish-Jewish accentuation. We are driven further ; they annihilate everything. It was underground—the rooms were sultry with the over-emphasized coal-fire. Small men, bent on making it a success, were busy between tables. A guitar tinked " I am here," but not assertive—not till the audience was reliable and passive.

" Where have *you* been," said the short-haired girl in horn-rims. " Talk a little. I thought you'd been dead."

" Perhaps I have been. One dies at times, passes under earth. See if you can draw me back. I'm decaying even now before your eyes."

" Easy. I've listened to you talking like a fluid. You'll *trickle* back into vitality. What have you *seen ?* What have you been hearing ? "

" Nothing," he said. " It's for you to enlighten me."

" Oh, well . . . you've been to the show of the Centre Group ? Does that mean no ? My *dear*, you are a depression to-night. Of course, you're going . . . Lipper's exhibiting ; and Bobbin has an abstract—quite good—the ' Orange-porters,'—mechanical motive repeating itself ; you *feel* them

blindly in step and the fruit shaking as if it were being carried along on a rather loose band not properly adjusted. A machine just a *little* out of gear. It reminds me of . . . what ? Who else has done the same stuff ? "

" Hundreds. Hundreds. Not so flagrantly perhaps, or so decoratively."

" Oh, but *who ?* Wait a bit, I'm sure I shall remember. But tell me. You've studied it so much."

" Hundreds," he repeated. " The world is hardening round us now like a mechanism out of gear. They all sense it ; they're all driven to it. Human passions, human personality, the very meaning of ' human ' evaporates in us under our fingers. Some cling to the corpse—attempt to electrify it. The rest of us go the easier way, and realize that our passions are like pistons and our mass enthusiasms like a running band. It's the system, the system. Urged on by it, as it calcifies, we squeeze all that has breath out of our creations, harden up with it, and hope there may be safety in patterns and patterns and more patterns. As if patterns could do anything else than calcify in their turn. Listen. The guitar. Who's that ? "

" Francesca. Don't you know her ? "

" And the customary kind of song. Why do they always sing'm ? "

An attention—a voice blended with negroid slurs and pouts—

" She asked for a dollar.
He gave her four.
I'm a good young man
An' I guess you're a whore . . ."

" My God ! " he said. " But tell me . . . look at me and tell me, what are your sensations when you hear that. And this now ? What *are* they ? Don't be speechless. You can tell me."

" Don't be an idiot, Brabant. I'm feeling tired to-night. I'm not inclined for things to be laughable. I'm seeking . . ."

" True, but so am I. I'm in search. Tell me about it. If we were discussing the ins and outs of Lesbianism, you'd communicate ; if I asked you about the morality of child-bearing, you'd coldly calculate. Now tell me . . . have you no shock behind your feminine skin ? I will denude myself in turn. What about these songs ? "

" I see nothing to discuss," she replied. " We are all adult.'

" Are we ? But are we ? Not rather on the most infantile of stages ? . . . compared with which ' Mammies ' and ' Roses-round-the-door ' are supreme wisdom and worldiness. You de-sex yourself into an ' adult.' My dear girl, what *is* an adult ? It's no more than the phrase we have invented to conceal from ourselves all that sex really means ; and under cover of it what mean privy games we can have ! How rare are the moments when we can be hardily, speechlessly orgasmic. We have become words, not bodies. Where is freedom ? Where does fear end ? "

Posters breeding afresh and afresh. They came up, white and purple and red and orange, on every wall—name after name. He longed for it to end. A faint cheering came from lighted halls, where he would not enter. Why do they cheer ? The unstoppered shriek of poor souls glorified for a moment in the race—the will—the victory. Life for the poor souls—a little less than the frenzy of their frothing League Match, a little more than sixpence on a race they can never see, and evening papers snatched at four o'clock. " This is not Power," he said, " but cautious fingers that at intervals take out the cork and feel it foam ; but they . . . they could burst the bottle ; " and through it all he heard them singing slowly past his window, timelessly, undeviated from their loss.

He was with Eve again—dancing through a hothouse somewhere under the cold streets, the cellar of a club ; bare walls passed them, and the six or seven couples kept twisting round those two thin pillars till he felt snakes all over him. One record followed another—selected and wound by moistening hands. He took off his coat. " We can't dance for ever. Sit out for a *moment*, anyway. Here, on this table. It's boiling. Why did you want to come here ? "

" There wasn't any need for you to come," she said, " if you don't like it."

" Oh, well. I said I'd come out with you to-night. Isn't it putridly hot ? Lord ! "

" What a fuss you make. Undo your shirt if you want to. *They* don't care. I wish you hadn't come now. I'd be much easier without you."

" Yes, but *this* hole," he complained. " Are you expecting anyone down ? Rachel ? "

" No, I'm not. I thought you'd like a dance with me, that's

all. I had the idea of giving you another try-out. I want to be fond of you . . . come *on;* I must dance. If I don't I shall smash the record. Can't keep my hands still now."

"Oh. . . ." He swung his legs. "Must I just because. . .? Oh, yes, yes, I wish I could understand you."

"Don't be cheerful. I wish I could understand myself." They sat perspiring and itching, on the edge of energy. "What have you been doing now?" she asked. "Have you told me everything you've done?"

"Yes, yes. You're quite aware I have."

"Seen Irene lately?"

"No."

"Or Maurice?"

"*No.* I'm not likely to see one without the other; and anyhow, where do our circles coincide? I . . . haven't had any opportunity. Have I?"

"I feel I want to cry," she said.

"What?"

"Dance quickly. I can't stand it. Oh . . . it's finished. Put it on again, please. Yes, on again. Hugh, give me one of those chrysanthemums; yes, out of that vase. I must have something in my hands. M'm . . . what was I going to say? What about Maurice and that Grimball? I thought you were going out with them? You were going to 'phone them up."

"Oh, *that*," he said, shrugging. "There's plenty of time. Don't bother me with them just now. I really haven't the time or emotion to spare on them."

"You're changing."

"So are you. You're less comprehensible every day. I'm beginning to have a hunted feeling. Where I gain a fragment of certainty one end, you come in like a quagmire at the other. Maurice must wait. I'll look after him."

He glared. Something venturously co-ordinated before them out of the spider's web background of winding and shirt-sleeves and hair-handlings—a soul presenting itself. He had no idea who it was.

"I say," entwined the long fingers and the long nose. "I don't know if you remember . . . er . . . er . . we met at Rachel's place. Office, you know. I saw your awfully good stuff."

"You're right," said Eve, "but I haven't the vaguest idea about your name."

" Oh, Crowborough," and he conveyed a simplicity honestly gratified. " Would you care to dance this one ? Oh, *do*."

" Ye-es. Yes, p'raps. All right, I will." She nodded—" My husband this is."

" Oh . . . h'h . . . how do you do ? "

" How do you do ? "

They approximated, fitted, merged, slid away. A false step or so—recovery and mated motion. He said, " I say, are you cold ? Your arm's quivering."

" That's nothing."

" No . . . er . . . I was imagining. I say, I didn't realize you were married. It's a vital shock."

" Oh, yes, you did. One *always* knows really. There's something—I don't know—about people ; they smell married."

" Do you think so ? " he asked. " But then I've got a ghastly intuition for anything like that—positively unendurable at moments. I should have estimated from your way of speaking that you were unmarried. It's *so* hard to communicate. . . . You dance in the same fashion. You answer probe with probe, stimulus with stimulus ; I find it unrestful and dreadfully engaging."

" What *are* you ? " she said.

" Oh. . . . Oh, an artist, you know. Unattached with a lonely studio in the slums of Chelsea, where I design the most fearfully interminable tea-trays and patterns for textiles and refined wall-papers. You can't conceive how ghastly it is to realize that the same basic pattern will be repeated a thousandfold—a millionfold. I wake up all alone in cold *sweats*."

" Doesn't your Bolshevism console you a little ? "

" Oh, my dear girl, *don't* keep reminding me of all my adolescent fervours. It's terrible how they haunt me. I pass from one to another ; I have an everlasting puberty. Take advice from a world-weary man—Bolshevism only *sounds* engaging. I read some of the books. I took pains. It's a ghastly affair as cold and utilitarian as a bucket. Absolutely. The most dreadfully frozen chemical brains confront one. I trembled all over. They throw everything up . . . everything, with the vaguest idea that something else is bound to sort itself out, no one knows what. Extinction of charm, simple optimism, colour."

" I had hoped," she said. " I don't see much colour in *this* sort of existence."

" Oh, but there will be. Oh, please do let me persuade you. I do trust this isn't another efflorescence of puberty ; the thought makes me quite feverish. It's *so* mortifying. I say, earnestly. I do feel our soul can be recreated—the age of sacrifice, of the troubadour who sang and fought to purify the ardour of life. We sicken for a *tinted* world—toned adequately, of course, to our modern feeling, for significant blends. We must end these petrifying struggles that grind us from above and below, the hoof-print of the Jew with its merciless calculations and spirit of the account-book. We must open an avenue to pageantry. I say . . . you're not bored ? Oh, I should be so depressed."

" It's me that's depressed, because I know you're talking nonsense. But I forgive you. I don't bear any grudge. P'raps it's easier to talk nonsense . . . and I don't mind hearing it sometimes for a change, even from you."

" I say, you raise my spirits."

But Hugh had another way ; only the movement of unreadable lips when he cared to look towards them and the unison of limbs. A tune hammered deliberately through upon the under-flowing metallic sigh, beating it with impatience—with irritations, each tap a blister.

He disliked this creature—but he couldn't tell why. How met, then ? Where met ?—and there was something in him of Grimball and of Maurice, too ; both of whom had to be considered. Yes. He would invite them. He had no strength. To-morrow and to-morrow ; to-morrow never comes—but Eve ? His head thickened with her ; down here one danced in soup. What was it she wanted ? He saw—as in a transparent glass—all the days since she cracked that bowl—days through which he had crawled on, never daring to question himself ; and he had glanced at her, thinking muddily, " Mad ? " and gone out again. " Mad ? " and again gone out, always hoping for strength. Did *he* think—" Mad ? " What was it she wanted ? He said " She wants to be enlarged ; she suffers as we all do from this breath of closets and futility, but in her own way ; and she believes I can give it her perhaps. I ? Perhaps she believes so. What belief ! I can't find it even for myself."

The night streets again, found many times wet and raw

after rain, as though dry skin had been peeled off them—off the houses and lamp-posts, the submarine nudity of poor lives, men wrapped wet with twisting faces like frogs—horses amphibious beating up the splash—spawn of children. He worked through to the pitch of the medicine-vendor. Every other sale was there—no medicine. He tried again and failed again ; and at the door of Number 21 in that by-street he was told the boy was out. He had described and recalled hesitantly to a small girl that picked at her fingers.

" You mean my Johnnie."

" Are you . . . his sister ? " She giggled. " Are you ? "

" Yes, 'course I am."

" He's not in ? "

" No-o-o . . . he's out ; he's doing the Elections."

" Oh, I see. Yes. Will he be home soon ? " She giggled. He took it as dismissal, " Well, good night," he said.

" I remember you. You were the gentleman that fell . . . that fell down and . . . an' dropped your stick." He confessed to it ; there was the flavour of a declaration under the pure cruelty. They flirted awhile. Loitering from street to street with evil, dry tastes in his mouth—he cursed this Election ; it had liquefied everything suddenly, swept these beings into a new untraceable solution just when he needed them most. How long before it was all over ? Why *did* they submit themselves to be parts of this mechanism, this obscene ritual—recrudescent at intervals of years or months ? Nothing creative in it, only a mild complacency at their own emasculating—expressionless lumps in labour working themselves sick—the uncounted vulgarities and intrusions upon their neighbours with croaking spittle and butter " Come on behalf of . . . to solicit your kind vote and interest . . . ; " after it all the thin cross pocked on a parsimonious strip of paper. " That's *all* you have to do . . . so easy." An insolence—the everlasting sneer they are told to make at themselves, as if a tidal wave wanted ease.

A hall of some kind drank in from its street in twos and threes ; he paused. By the door were notices he did not read —and lounging with a red rosette on him, a tired ugly man. He took interest ; he offered a leaflet that Hugh folded. " Coming in ? " His nose was large ; he had grapes for eyes ; his accent was Hugh's own, well-lipped and lazy. " We're getting full."

" No . . . no," said Hugh. " I'm sorry. No time on my hands this evening. I just delayed a moment to watch." But should he go in ? He was restrained—frightened—shrank from understanding what he loathed. " But I'm very . . . you know . . . sympathetic, of course."

" Oh, quite, quite." His attention left ; he began to roar without any modesty, that this was the last five minutes and the hall bunged up—and yet his voice was a modest one. He wiped his mouth with a silk handkerchief and put his face into Hugh's, winking. " *Hell* of a sweat these Elections. I've been absolutely done up every day for the last week. Dragged myself down to the Committee Rooms every evening."

" Is it so hard ? Is it . . . *necessary ?* "

He was hoarse ; his roughened cartilages tickled in Hugh's throat. " God ! you begin to lose the sense of the word necessity after a time. Take my advice and don't get drawn into the Movement. It forces you to work. . . . I don't know how it does it. I find my arms and legs moving by themselves. Never was slave-driving like it. Be sympathetic if you like ; but keep your sympathy for the back drawing-room, that's what I say—where they can't see a poster hanging out. Otherwise you'll be doing something for a dead cert ; and when you've taken one step, you might as well walk up the whole ladder quietly and put your head down for them to cut off ; it saves trouble. Either that or look up the boat-trains for some nice secluded island in the Pacific. And even there. . . ." He coughed and wiped his lips again. " God ! my throat." He glanced at Hugh as an affair of business—" I suppose you wouldn't like to give away a few of these leaflets while you're waiting ? "

" You know, I *really* oughtn't to stop . . . really. No, no, I must refuse. Sorry."

" So long."

" Er . . . so long."

One midnight later on light came through his drawing-room keyhole. He entered. The air was a cold plane up his face.

" Why have you the window open ? " said he. " Why haven't you lighted the fire ? There seems no use in asking you questions now ; you never answer." He closed the window. " I must light the fire. I can't help it ; it's cold, like an open field."

" I was too lazy to do it ; I was thinking. Here—I haven't

touched a brush for weeks. I've tried to cook—but I can't. What is it that drives me back to this flat every night ? "

" Drives you ? It isn't *I*. . . ." He stood gazing at her. " My dear," he said, gently, " I have been inconsiderate. What has gone wrong with us ? " He breathed deeply and slowly ; his body felt like a sea, overwhelmingly aware of itself. " Days upon days have passed. Sometimes you change for a moment . . . in bed and you seem happiest there ; you return to your body and appear to fill it."

" No, I don't ! " she said. " I don't. I have to do it ; I'm forced to do it. It's part of my creed. I'm like a religious maniac, when we're sleeping together—I'm trying to find some wild relief, as though I were drinking myself mad out of the sacrament-cup. Do you care for this flat ? "

" It's as good as any we could find. What repels you in it ? "

" It's so thin—like an irritatingly thin scent. I take a mouthful of it and want to vomit, because there's nothing there."

He walked up and down. " Would not any place be much the same to-day ? "

" Any place. . . . That's the tragedy ; that's why I return to it again and again."

" I've been wondering," said he. " You were born in the country. Do you suppose . . .? "

" Oh, yes, *I've* been wondering—the chestnut-trees and the hazels and the silence. . . . But it isn't for me—not with my temperament. I only wish it were. I knew it wasn't all the time and that's why I came away. Now, if I'd been a squirrel or a monkey, you could have taken me to the Zoo and had me shut in a cage—a fairly warm cage. It's all I'm fit for. You could come and see me sometimes and give me fruit. . . ." She suddenly went across and opened the window again. He said nothing ; he merely sat watching her round his eyelids ; theirs was a high flat. " Have you seen Maurice yet ? " she asked.

" H'm. . . . No, not yet." He bent over the gas-fire and hugged it like a womb.

" When do we go next to your home ? "

" We said somewhere towards the end of November."

" Oh, that's too far ahead. How many weeks is it ? One, two, three. . . . You must ring up Maurice before then."

" Yes, all right. I say, that window . . ."

" In a moment. You have the fire there. If you don't see Maurice and the rest, *I* can't—not after that scene at Irene's house. I . . . don't want to. Talk a little, Hugh. May we talk about your father ? "

A thought slid angularly across his mind like a film with cutting edges. He remembered ; he forgot how he had ever forgotten. " My father ? I met him the other day."

" You never told me. Where ? What did he say ? "

He answered out of the heat, clearing his gullet. " Oh, in the City it was, a few days back. Just a few days, you know. I mislaid it ; I can't think how. Why are you leaning out of the window ? Eve ! Can't she hear ? Why are you leaning out ? "

As he touched her—" That bobby there," she whispered, pointing towards a shadow and a damp footbeat. " If one of these flower-pots went down just behind him. . . ."

" No."

It was over. A small fir-tree was whirling round. Had he cried out ? His heart went down with it. A thousand splinters —ninety feet below at least.

" Don't," he said. " Come in. Don't lean out." He huddled over her to stare down ; he assumed the blank pure face of the absolutely accidental—drawl of the well-to-do.

He turned away to the dry sorting-out of life ; it was a thin duty without the comfort of wholesome sweat. This matter must be settled. Their bell rang. It all took time ; there were explanations and easy laughter and, " Oh, of course, we've got them well-protected " of the citizen—and that manly admission that the constable had a right to lecture him. A little silver passed. Then he closed the door and came back.

Such a thing troubled him. Such a thing does not, of course, happen—and so need be taken into no account. Yet it had happened. He could not resolve the paradox. He lay awake and heard them singing below his window.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

DESOLATE days followed on. Tension came to Eve's spirit quickly, in one night. All conflict ceased. She held breath merely; her eyes asked relief. Knowing the crack must follow, she waited dumbly. In mornings alone she cried over the yellow cat because it wasn't human and had none of these problems. She discharged tears like a burden; tension rose again terrifying and dry. If only the world would praise her for this staunch humanity—but nobody cared. Nobody answered that to be human is melancholy and yet sweet. They came and went. Sharpened by pain she weighed up all she found in her; and it was clammy dust that would not be blown away, and a taste on her tongue like rotted apple-core. She hung there searching round—searching round—searching at Hugh. She was tired out. She looked at him curiously; and he went on in slow time as the world goes—slowly opened sluggish mouth and slowly closed, masticated. They were dining together in a small restaurant off Regent Street. It was early on a Saturday evening.

She felt too weak to be peevish with him. In a moment he had become necessary. She watched; he raised slack lids from staring at his plate and found her watching—"Yes? You're looking at me? Is the food all right?"

"M'm?"

"I was wondering," said he in a growl, shifting his eyes, "whether you'd mind if after all I went out to-night. H'm. . . ." He waited, wrinkling up his face.

"No. Do go, my dear."

"Thanks. . . ." His eyes kept passing hers; he didn't understand.

"Hugh," she said. "Hugh, where is the end of this search of yours? Did I speak of *ends?* No, nothing ever ends. . . . I meant—culmination, where is its culmination? Will it soon blossom into some certainty that is just right?"

"I hope so," he said, and seemed for awhile hunched into his shoulders like an old man—far away. "Yes, I hope so. I'm wondering . . . whether I'm going the proper way. The Election put me off. It's so artificial and degrading. You know, I didn't even vote. . . . The truth is, one *does* procrastinate."

" I don't want to hurry you ; but have you seen Maurice yet ? "

" No. But I will. I will. That's the next step. What about a liqueur to-night ? For a treat ? They have a few, I think. Er. . . ." He meditated. " Yes."

" Why do you say yes ? "

" M'm ? "

" You speak as though you brooded on some intolerably deep speculation. I wish I could share it."

" I wish I could find words for it."

The Pantaloon was like a cistern ; they trickled into it, two drops—almost into emptiness and the fire still smoked. A couple of men were fretfully eating spaghetti in the far corner. " I'll wait a few minutes ; " and he was silent, with legs stretched out. She drank at her coffee, and grew cold. Some one would arrive soon ; they were expecting ; arrangements had been made. She found herself staring timidly at him, and then yawned, and saw the evening dull before her. She dragged at her wrap.

It was Mr Crowborough, who by chance arrived and fell into conversation ; his voice rattled round like a stone ; everyone stirred.

He sat by Hugh. " I never expected to find you two nice people. I'm really surprised . . . absolutely. Though I don't know why I should be."

Hugh was dumb. She said, " You haven't told us whether it was pleasurable yet."

" Oh, it's a relief. Like a *very* comfortable sofa. I couldn't have endured anything harsh or unsympathetic. I've been working myself positively sick this afternoon. I got on to that pitch where it's like eating strawberries and one says to oneself : ' I know I shall vomit shortly, but I can't stop the mechanism of my throat and fingers . . .' Ghastly. No, have one of mine. Oh, *do*. I'm sure I had one of yours last time."

" Rachel's coming up to-night."

" Oh, is she ? You know, I am not sure if you're a bosom friend of hers, but she's a woman that terrifies me. Isn't it extraordinary ? D'you think so ? I wonder if I feel equal to it this evening. I wish I could just stop and talk to you two." The hours had opened ; he had set a melody going as on a gramophone, and she settled into it—felt it wasn't too bad.

She felt she could get through it, a well-known motif; and the other phrases were beginning to flow in. Lipper arrived —Silberstein with a woman. Mr Crowborough tuned the table with his long fingers. "I suppose we three couldn't go off and dance somewhere . . . get hold of a fourth?"

"Hugh's got to leave in a minute," she answered.

"Oh, I say, have you? That's putrid."

"I am afraid so."

"But what will *you* do?"

"Oh, I expect I shall be quite composed," said Eve, "whatever happens." She had recovered now; the room warmed—others lounged in—Rachel Hagen.

Hugh rose and came round the table. "I think I'll be off now."

She raised her eyes open at him and shrank into a small girl, watching his expression. "Yes, my dear."

He hesitated—"Good-bye. I shan't be late,"—nodded to the rest and went down the steps.

He had felt the strange tension that looked out of her eyes, begging him for relief; it drove him on; action seemed to him more needful—more compulsory than ever in his life before.

It was only twenty to eight, but the medicine-vendor was already packing up. "Hul-*lo*. Here we are again then."

"Aren't you early to-night?" said Hugh.

"I am."

"Sold out?"

"I am not." His face dived several times and rose puffing mystery. "You've come again, then?"

"I came along before."

"What? Here, d'you mean? *Here?* Not in Election time. No, no. No, no. Surprised at you expecting it. You don't find me losing the chance of a cut at the bastards . . . if it isn't over the edge of a barricade, over the edge of a platform. Hear my voice?"

"Hoarse?"

"It *would* have been, if I hadn't taken some of this here mixture. See? Read the label. I took it myself. What's the time?" He lost a large watch in his palm—"Quarter of an hour. Time to have one. Come along, m'boy." He bellied him forward, panting; the great bag hung dead, rattled against the swing-doors under the palm-leaves. "No-o, you

don't want beer. A whisky, like me. I'm going to put guts into you to-night, m'boy. On the loose, I s'pose ? Hey ? "

" Well, I had thought . . . I saw there was an Unemployed procession this evening, collecting and building up their movement somewhere . . . where was it ? " He dragged out a newspaper cutting.

" You don't want Unemployed processions. I got something that'll do you more good than them. I got a treat. Wait a mo'. Ching-a-ling."

" Where are you taking me ? "

" Drink up. You're behind. Ah, now, by God ! are you fit ? Hey ? Are you fit ? You'll be thanking me in a few minutes. Another ? We-ell, quick then . . . only a short'n this time. Keep your ears clear. G'luck . . . Vive l'Commune ! "

" What ? "

" Now. Now. Come on. Forward to the barricades." Resplendent they strode, steps smartly falling in unison. Nothing had been like this since the world began. A veil followed him, expunging all life before that moment. He had no back, a face and a breast-bone only. They hurried ; air flapped them. *He* knew some of this was whisky—but whisky that released the undeviating, the ecstatic—towards the barricades.

They had arrived before great working-class dwellings ; through a doorway they had plunged. He woke on stairs interminable, and was panting. " Where are you leading me ? " The vendor's back burrowed upwards like a mole ; there was darkness. " What ? " said he again, and heard the vendor snort. At every floor opened balconies and air ; the faint world puffed upon them. He exclaimed. He burst higher, levering himself by the cold iron balustrade, and caught the vendor's arm. " Don't hurry so. I'm breathless. Where are you leading me ? "

" Come on."

" No, no," he said, irritably. " I'm not interested in surprises ; let me understand."

The vendor seemed to resent ; his lips moved wetly in the darkness. " Oh, all right. Please yourself. It's just a little birthday party I've had invitation for—strictly limited invitations." He brooded and saw reasonableness. " It's my belief you'll like it ; it's my belief you *want* it. Don't expect too much, but . . . seventy-five he is to-day," said he inti-

mately, "and fought in the Paris Commune. Ah, that's a memory!—fought as a Communard and escaped over this side. Ah, that's the goods. Was it worth coming?"

"Worth coming?" said the young man, meekly. "Was it worth your while to bring me? This is a party for those that understand—not for me. How shall I even begin to appreciate it?"

"Hey? Why shouldn't you?"

"I?" He struggled in deep waters. "The Commune?—I've heard of it, but little more. The Parisian workers seized the City, did they not?"

"That's right, m'boy. Come on . . ."

"No, no." He stopped him breathlessly. "Give me a chance. Tell me what happened—quickly."

"Over the Bastille," said the vendor of medicines, "they hung up the red flag. They hung the red flag over Paris. They drove out the bourgeoisie, and for two months they ruled Paris. Then the bourgeoisie came back. . . . By Christ, man, why are you hesitating? You shall hear all this. What more do you want to know? We'll take a spare evening later; now forward—forward." He was exasperated. He tossed with delays; and his bag, as he swung it, jerked against Hugh's knee-cap; but he paid no heed. Once only on the next flight he paused, looked over his shoulder and panted, "Here . . . here. There'll be some wine going; you can bet on that." He turned again. Mutely, they climbed towards the very stars.

At last he knocked upon a door and was answered. Beyond the door was a narrow passage and beyond the passage a room grey with the smoke of pipes. Ash covered the worn carpet. Men sat there—a dozen of them or fifteen—patient as the dead, discoursing in sententious undertones. No breath of coming stirred them. Some nodded; some in undertones greeted. About them was smoke of old discourse, smoke of old wars; if they awaited some overwhelming crisis, they waited for decades.

He saw the pivot of their homage—and, as he saw him, recognized that there was a woman here sitting quietly, and two young children by her; and stared again at the aged creature by the hearth. He was being ushered to its chair. The vendor had already bent and whispered—glanced back and whispered again; and Hugh was looking into strange sinkless eyes and muttering good wishes.

He found a vacant chair. He took it and could be unnoticed.

There was no more than the movements of one wide-faced heavy male, who chose a bottle from the many upon the table and poured him out a glass. "French wine?" he said. "You'll take some—for my old man's birthday;" and in a Londoner's tones he spoke and winked and nodded. The vendor had his glass; others were refilled.

"Bon sante," cried the vendor; and Hugh murmured, confusedly, and, raising his glass before he drank, found the eyes of the old Communard eating him like pallid sands.

They would not quit him. He stared and left them for the grey smoke curtain above the room's centre. The talk went on. He sat alone, sipping among many; and still there seemed no consummation; and the room's fragments grouped themselves in his mind towards no sweet crisis. What spirits were these?—the whispering of children to their mother behind him, a man's gross features nodding to his neighbour and nodding, red wine slowly diminishing. The window there was open and its blue cretonne curtains drawn back; beyond lay night—but night, he saw, over a dim parapet; they were on the turrets. What were these spirits?—between the bottles a great white cake, unportioned with its knife by it, and designed in red letters—"Vive la Commune." The smell of spilt wine controlled him, the smell of manifold tobaccos and of three red carnations that stood in a vase between himself and the fireside; and his eyes grew weary, moved with the moving smoke and fell again upon that bloodless face. Its stare was eating him.

In his distress, he suddenly yawned with boredom; had he not yawned, he would have been afraid. He gazed curiously at this old corpse—one fragment of a room of fragments. So stares a corpse. Broad bones it had and the face's skin had set and thickened about them in white cushions; its forehead was high and bald and smooth; its nose had squashed fuller and fuller into an ugly breadth and the nostrils peeped outwards. It sat with tight fingers on its chair-arms.

He started at the vendor's voice. "Yes?" said he. "Yes?"

"A little later," breathed the vendor at his ear. "Only a few minutes maybe; he takes time to accustom himself to company. That's the trouble." He coughed and raising himself saw suddenly those eyes. "Why, what . . .?" said he;

and as he spoke, others, too, had seen. Like him they were conscious of protraction ; talk had grown ragged and chair-legs scraped the floor. They mused unfavourably on the open window, on the burnished pans above the fireplace ; they coughed ; they let their glances fall towards the ancient thing.

So, in a moment, they realized ; and it was queer—and then startling—and then mysterious. They nudged one another. They held their breath. " What ? At whom ? "

" At him. . . ."

" Why, so he is," and they fixed their brows, and the whole room crawled with modesty and discomfort. The children, too, were silent.

Hurriedly the broad-featured host left his bottles ; his glances were apologetic. He patted the aged hand—" Here, Papa, aren't you going to say a word ? Hey ? We're all waiting for you to say a word."

The eyes never shifted ; even their lids did not flicker.

" What ? " said he, shrugging. " Cough it up, then, Papa ; let's know the worst." He stared round helplessly. " *Now*, what's come over him ? Lord above knows. . . . Bed, Papa —you'll have to go off to bed, if you're tired ; I'll take you off myself, I will ; " and his large lips began to pout. " Take you myself, I will." He twisted away with a gesture.

" Simon." The old creature snapped in a moment at his sleeve ; he spoke his English harshly in a high and strangely brutalized voice. " Attend to me ; who is that there ? "

" He ? He's a friend brought in by one of your camarades. Are you satisfied ? "

" No, I am not satisfied. Will they soil my birthday . . . *mine* . . . by asking to come near me this froth of the boulevards ? Agh ! Pah ! Any other day I have to endure them, and I do not say that some of them are not good fellows ; but to-day I will choose my own company. Pah ! Elegants . . .," and leaning over he spat on the carpet. There was a horrified shuffling. The woman rose and the blue curtains wavered.

" Here—bad manners," said the son, lifting his hands.

" Bad company," cried the father, rolling in his chair. " Am I quickly insulted ? I ? No, I am not. I can endure all the mud you wish, all the filth, all the patronage. I have a right to speak ; it is my birthday. . . ." What he said last was drowned ; they were at Hugh's ear—the host, the medicine-vendor, others even—expounding the old man's weaknesses

and his moods and his decision ; and Hugh was answering them, " Yes, I understand ; I am not troubled. Why should I take offence ? " Again, through the babble he heard that high discordant voice. The host ran from him. He peered between bodies and saw the woman's easy face ; he saw the son's hands gesticulating and falling. There seemed only one way.

" Yes," said he sadly. " Shall I go ? "

As he spoke, a silence came. The group about him fell lazily off and mumbled. Strange things were happening ; he was himself—without clear transition—clasping the broad old hand, bending over the colourless face ; perfume of the aged flowed dry into his nostrils ; that corpse was smiling at him—smiling and nodding. The mood had changed. Hugh heard the vendor telling him so from one side, the woman at his other ear. They had persuaded and cajoled ; and now there was no restraint, there was no moderation—a chair for him at the old man's side, no less—the vigorous fingers always at his sleeve and the harsh voice chattering on. He was amazed. The room about them seethed with talk and laughter ; the bottles clinked ; the children flew madly from corner to corner.

" Yes, yes," cried the old Communard, trembling with excitement. " What first, Comrade ? Which have they told you yet ? Hey ? I am asking you. You do not remember precisely ? Let me ask you—let me recall to you—have they spoken to you how we marched out to the Forts ? Have they told you how I reported to Dombrewsky . . . how I said to him ' Comrade Dombrewsky,' I said, ' the Committee despatches to you these instructions,' and ping ! those pieces of shell came not a foot from us, and ' Attention, Comrade,' he said, ' and keep your head up.' . . . No ? They have not told you ? " His excitement flickered up to a fever ; his beard took life. " Then . . . then I will explain to you. I will show you my . . . my . . . my map. No, no. Not now. I will show it to you later. Come—come closer." He dragged the young man's arm ; his ugly nose was snuffling so fiercely that he had to pause and control his breath.

Hugh felt—and it became clear to him—that strangely this burst was no more than the perverse resolution of the old creature's bitterness. The two moods were but one. So wild an ecstasy had struggled in the veteran at the presence of a new listener, that it must be at any cost submerged ; he

would never admit it. He would be proud and dumb. " What ? " he would even say. " Is my memory as a Communard. . . . ? " and so forth and so forth, until they were all reasonably agitated and submissive. Then he yielded.

Yet, knowing all this, Hugh felt a sting. He frowned. " Tell me," said he, conscious now of favour, " about the bourgeoisie. That is what I wish to hear. *I* am bourgeois."

" Hey ? The Versaillese ? That is different. No, no, I know nothing of them ; they never caught me. I ? I skipped like a rabbit into a cellar of the twentieth arrondissement ; whose, I do not know. To this day I do not know. There we stood at the barricade Rue de Paris. That was my arrondissement, Comrade, the twentieth arrondissement ; where else I fought at the barricades I . . . I will tell you later. Yes, later. But wait a moment—first, we were defending the whole city . . . I will tell you about that later . . . and then each of us his own arrondissement, because after the fourth day there could be no instructions, and we all took instructions from La Commune, that was here—here—in our hearts, and the paving-stones leaped out of our streets to help us and built themselves into barricades. I was on the left, Comrade, with my old chassepot tight ; she was wet from the fog and the rain. I oiled her again. Smash—that was the shells—smash, smash ; they were dry old friends ; they were part of my ears. I lay in mud ; I was wet . . . one did not consider dying ; she could not make one muddier or wetter or sleepier ; that was all. The shells came, the glass went cracking, the tiles fell ; after a while—ping ! ping ! they were arrived. They were aiming at us. Blonk !—I fired my chassepot. In such a din one does not think ; one says—La Commune ; that is the whole of life. One heard . . . such a thing ; the Mairie is on fire—they are through the Rue Rebeval—they will turn us from the Rue des Près—retreat is ordered—no, we are advancing on the right. Suddenly—Smash ! " His voice grew almost incoherent and rapid. " I felt my skull crack against the wall ; they were streaming with blood, they were crying. A shell had caught the range—just behind us. Commander of barricade crawls to me—' Are you wounded ? ' ' No—but was it my skull burst or a shell ? ' ' Fire. Fire away. They are coming ' I pulled my trigger. I kept on pulling. ' Hey ! Ammunition, Comrades . . .' ' What ? Have you none ? ' . . ."

His breath went and he sat puffing and gasping and gri-

macing at Hugh. They were bygone things of which he spoke, and they had been drained—by frequency—of all emotion, but that excited in him from a listener. His phrases were smoothed by use. He was simple, having no need to lie.

It seemed that in that pause lengths of narrative had slipped by. He was not aware of silence. He opened moodily. " And so to myself I said, ' Evidently,' said I, ' It would be better at least to run from my own quarter, since the bourgeoisie must have the lists ' ; and I thought of my aunt's by Montmartre, and for her I made a run at night. . . . I chose midnight ; it was not early enough to tumble over friends I would not welcome ; it was not maybe late enough to make me a suspect. Hey ? You understand ? One must take chances. So . . . so out I came. Would you not have said that this must be a city of death now ? Ah, yes, yes, in some quarters, no doubt. . . ." He began to mumble ; his thoughts were growing weary. Then he said with sudden vigour—" Yes, that is so ; but listen now. Was this all ? You wonder—was this all ? No. I tell you, *no*. Here it was no more than the fourth night since the cannon were silent and already in the boulevards they promenaded . . . at that hour of night, Comrade, so late—the young elegants of the bourgeoisie, and then the women of the town and . . . and, you understand—' B'n soir, Fifi,' ' B'n soir, mon vieux,' and so on." He shrugged, lifting his palms. " It was so, I tell you. The cafés were full, even when their windows were broken. They sang and stamped. It was nothing to them ; Thiers' blood-hounds had swept off that canaille . . . so, into the rubbish-heap. All those comic fellows were back cracking their jokes ; all those chaps in the big cloaks could go on talking about their paint-boxes. I saw it ; I know. Ah ! my heart was like a rotten cabbage. . . ."

He nodded, almost asleep, and roused himself. Hugh could glance round ; and instantly he felt the crowd was restive ; he flushed. It was this concentration upon a single listener ; they hadn't bargained for it. Ritual was disturbed. The old man would tire. One or another lounged heavily across the room and back. The children were yawning over their mother's lap.

" Well ? " said the medicine-vendor and, stretching his arms, he came cheerfully to the fireside. " Well, now, Camarade, and what about a song ? "

The aged eyes started up at him like a hawk's. " Hey ? No, no. No, no." Utterly malignant, he brushed him aside, and snatched at Hugh's sleeve. " Come closer ; I want you to hear ; I may be to-morrow dead, so pay no attention to *them*. Listen . . . listen ; I will tell you ; " and a rapid snort of irritation rose in the room. Their feelings became vocal and then loud. It had gone too far.

Ten minutes later Hugh stood by the door, holding his hat. The flush had vanished ; he was pale. A dozen kindly faces had breathed into his, regretting—explaining again and again —thanking him for his willingness to go. They had stumbled over many legs to shake his hand ; the last bottle had been drained for him ; and across them he could still see the colourless, set features—for a moment irreconcilable, then slowly melting, then complacent. A corpse faded from his life. He stood as though on air, gazing into darkness over the faint battlements. " Good night," he said.

" Good night, m'boy," bellowed the vendor from his seat. " Good night," they cried. " Good-night," and the children waved their hands, and the smoke blew sideways. Must he then go ? He must ; the host stood waiting. He hesitated ; he turned and towards the old Communard he made a strange and humble little bow, and his lips moved.

In the cold passage the host touched his arm. " Papa didn't tell you," said he in his slow whisper. " He didn't—did he ? —how he had two uncles sent to the hulks. Eh ? And his own brother was taken and shot at the barricades . . . a kid of fourteen, mind you. They shot him against the wall and left him lying in his blood. Papa didn't hear of it till a year later or more. No, he don't usually talk of it till he's stirred pretty deep ; that'd be natural." He spoke simply, and drew a breath. " Yes, that's what they done to Papa's folk—what do you think of that ? " He appeared to swell ; he lifted his head quietly. " Then—good night. Good night. Mind how you go in the dark."

He closed the door between them. Hugh felt for the iron balustrade ; he descended a few stairs and caught himself back. They were singing. Three or four voices he heard roll and tinkle and the words were clear—

" C'est la lutte finale.
Groupons-nous . . ."

and then a hurricane of French and English beat all words into brazen trumpets and they roared and stamped. Already he was forgotten. They had begun their evening.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

WHEN he reached the street-lamps it was only nine o'clock. Suddenly he realized that his own evening lay before him. He hung a moment staring down a prospect of mean houses ; and then, with a rapid and malicious twist of his face, he thought of the crowded Pantaloon. He thought of it and murmured to himself. His footsteps clanked as he hurried.

Time fled along. He was in a 'bus ; he was off it and winding through to the Pantaloon. The same quarters and smells ; just now in a low, gas-lighted room resting upon a chair—here advancing upon the café, the lounging cliques. Was this not power ?—To see many worlds in one turn of the head. In a saloon bar he took drink, feeding new life with it, hesitant at the entrance to all those men and women. Slow went the shapes about the bar slowly consuming, ponderous ; fast thumped his heart ; even this bar held the future in it. He saw past and future coincide ; he, too, was among the prophets. Paris and London intermingled as the liquor crept palpably up along his blood.

He reached the Café, a picture unchanging—scarcely an alteration of pose or place, merely an accretion—fuller and clouded with smoke. He arose from the dead and they were surprised at him.

" Back, already ? It seems scarcely a minute . . ."

" Back ? Back ? Well, is it I that have come back, or is it all of you ? Let me get a chair in. Who knows what space is. I have been here where *I* am all the while. . . . Yes, I am here, darling ; I'll tell you the news. "

Eve was disquietened ; he threw an arm round her chair-back, over her shoulder, kept his hat on. Was *he* going to stay here ? Should *she ?* He saw young Crowborough grinning jealously ; at him he cast snake's eyes.

" Will you have a drink ? " said Crowborough.

" Yes. Yes. I will. I'm in the mood. A whisky sustains

one's memory. One can live in two lives with a whisky or so at intervals. Do you realize that? It isolates one in the middle of an environment that would otherwise appear perfectly sane—perfectly normal. Only by isolation can one appreciate the disparity . . . the contrast that is so relevant." He grew silent, thinking—"I mustn't get drunk, though, not with them;" and looked closely at Eve. "Do you want to stay here longer? I'm aching to talk. I've seen something fearful to-night."

She blinked. "An . . . accident?"

"No, no. I can't communicate now. I'll tell you, I'll tell you. I feel drunk with it."

He sank in and sipped; the table watched him. These intellects, then, still survived. After whatever cataclysm they flowed back; the parasitic oily swamp of culture flowed back, resumed its level in a hundred cafés and boulevards, turned unshaken again to its fingerings and vivisections of human struggle. Tranquil in their utter assurance that pain only exists for them to satirize and a civilization only arises for them to adorn and mollify—tranquil in their denial of change, except the changing cinematograph of life, two-dimensional and remote, food for the gnawing *mot*.

"M'm? What, darling?" he said.

"We've got to make up our minds. The others are waiting. We were talking just before you came of going on, dancing somewhere."

"Who were?"

"Rachel and this man . . . y'know, Crowborough . . . and p'raps one or two more."

He looked at Crowborough and licked his lips, wondering how to use this prophetic afflatus while it lasted. Could he pulverize Crowborough? Who else was here? "Well—anyway let's stroll down, the four of us . . . down towards Piccadilly. We can decide as we go." They herded themselves out, none of them comfortable.

In the street he began—Rachel and Crowborough wandering along fifteen paces ahead. "*Must* we dance? Listen . . . we're not really like these intelligentsia, you and I. Are we? There's something that keeps us permanently apart from them. I'm seeing it. We're living an incompatible life. I want to explain what I realize. If we stay with them, I shall have to pour it out in front of them."

She broke in weakly, " Oh, stop. Oh, stop. I can't bear it. You're stirring all the misery in me again."

He stopped dead. " Me ? I have ? You . . . you are a funny little creature, darling. Just let's consider . . ."

" What are you stopping for ? "

" To consider what you said. All right. Stroll then—stroll gently."

" Are you a bit drunk ? " she said.

" No, no. Drink always makes me fuddled and muddled. I'm contemplating existence with a clarity and a perspicuity I never thought possible."

" Hugh, for Christ's sake. . . . What *is* the secret then ? You must tell me now. Tell me, tell me. You know I can't stand much more. Bring it out . . . *please*. See, I'm being quite cool, and imploring you to tell me. Give me some hint. Oh, what are you stopping for again ? You *are* drunk. They're looking round."

" I am not stopping. Really, I want to . . . explain . . . to you . . . very . . . soberly, that I'm absolutely not drunk. My brain is as clear as crystal. I have realized to-night what *we* are, and what those creatures we call the proletariat are, by comparison with us. Everything has vanished, but the struggle. What do we create that stirs me for a moment ? All that *they* create," he said with shaking voice, " is immediately smashed up, brutally, before they have time to do anything but lay down their foundations ; and who does it ? Who smashes ? *We* do. When I think about it, that I might have been born into a decent, clean civilization, if only they'd been allowed to go on when they *did* try so courageously, then I. . . . And now they'll smash up Russia if they can, and I feel I can't bear listening to them. They're so mad with conceit and they hate anything placid and simple and anything that reduces them to the level of ordinary human beings."

" Oh, I wish you'd. . . . Dear, you haven't told me quietly yet what's happened. I'm waiting here to know."

" Yes, yes. I'll tell you. I *am* telling you. It isn't what you imagine. It isn't a blaze of light or a vision or a voice ; that's not the way things happen—not things of this kind. It was only a sort of celebration."

" A sort of what ? "

" A birthday party . . . an old, old man, a Parisian ; I can't tell you in the middle of this crowd. Why do they push

and grind so ? One feels like a ball flung from side to side. The porkish, concupiscent scum. *I* can't stay here. . . ."

" No use stopping dead, Hugh. Please don't do it. We'll arrange something ; we must explain to the others. Do let's get out of the Circus and breathe a moment."

She couldn't mistrust him—dared not. Her sense of dilation was too exquisite, returning on her with his return. She thrust her way by him, bitterly patient, watching his steps ; she was like a waiting cow—dumb. They bobbed in and out. Sky-signs ran maddening cascades down into the pool. He brushed a passage through ; she followed, and fluck ! he was against a grey-coated back at the corner where tides meet and crossers pause ; and the body, when it turned, was Maurice—and Grimball with him—both in silk scarves, white shirt-fronts ; they were big-featured with faint intoxication. " Hu'o." " Wha' ? Who is it ? Mmm—hu'o." Their heels were trodden ; he didn't worry, he had forgotten everything. Drink called to drink. Their faces intermingled in a fragmentary triangle of odours. " After *all* this time." He took an arm of each, tapping with his fingers on them. A confusion of hatred and delight, that frightened him, flung him up against them ; he wasn't sure whether he wanted to kiss them or beat their heads together. " Well ? Well ? What are you two doing ? Where are you going ? "

Maurice buttered a smile over the world—buttered the world with his voice. " Mmmmm, what a night. What a night. Why, there's Evelyn. How are you . . . mmm ? How are you, m'dearest girl ? Here's old Grim. Y'remember old Grim."

" How d'you do ? "—but he wouldn't look at her, suspicious and spiteful ; Hugh he didn't mind, not a bit—pumped his hand up and down. He knew Brabant was mad, of course, but he was a jolly good sort, good type really.

" Mmm—what a night. Dreadful fellow, old Grim ; let me warn you against him before it's too late. Leading me down the garden in all my purity . . ."

". . . and the blighters have tickets for a theatre and they've messed off."

" Fam'ly party. Just what your friends *would* do. Mmmm —what do you think of that ? Had tickets all the time for a b-b-blurry theatre, and Grim leads me down to Piccadilly Circus."

" In the air for the last hour. Theatres all full up. Where are *you* going ? "

With the side of her eye Eve saw the two others uneasily hesitating, on a fringe ; this must be liquefied. She felt a strange docility. Her toes were trodden. She suddenly managed to put a hand on Hugh's sleeve. " Hugh."

" Eh ? " They moved their lips, face to face.

" Take 'em away. Do something with 'em. Lose 'em."

" Ah. Ah. Just what I was thinking. What about you ? "

" I'm all right. I'll go off with Rachel and. . . . Get on, or they'll drift away. Your *chance*. They've nothing to do. You know where to take 'em ; you've got some plan, haven't you ? "

" I have," he nodded with mouth like a lion's. " Not half, I haven't."

She gulped and peered at them round him with large eyes. Ecstasy shook her. She squeezed his arm and ran away to the others, skipping through the crowd.

Grimball was the more suspicious. He struggled into an eagle stare and eyed Hugh's generalized invitations. " Yes. H'm . . . h'm. Yes." But Maurice was an emollient over the world, sweetly blinking, in that mind where accidents cannot happen. " Mmm—rather. Rather. Top-hole. Away —away into the night of doubt and sorrow. Shall I summon a taxi? Just a moment, what about a drink first? He's gone. . ."

Hugh was on the pavement's edge—" Taxi. Taxi."

" Summoning our cavalcade."

" Here, where's he going ? Eh ? "

" Don't know. Don't care. Never mind ; just a crank, old dear. Harmless old crank, doesn't mean any harm. Isn't capable. I love old Hugh."

" Are they *all* engaged ? Here, taxi."

They ascended with dignity. He waited outside, gave directions in a stern voice and followed. Inertia—the journey in a box, one of humming transitions and of swerves, jerked stoppages ; dark feature sobering gently and withholding judgment. No one knew where they were. " Hearts of o-oak are our ships, jolly ta-ars are our men . . . ; " that was Grimball, the rest were silent. The journey lengthened ; there was a sensation of lavishness. Hugh had time to think, and remember where last he had seen them—in the drawing-

room. Yes, he meditated it. Here was an avenue of speed rushing towards the barricades. Nothing less. How silent had grown these back streets through which they needled, almost swept clean. He struggled to disengage the present from the past, London from Paris; and in the struggle his will subsided. He gave way, sank into fresh intoxication. ". . . I am an outlaw, I have a king-dom beneath my sway-y-y. . . ." This is the kind of man that sings in a taxi, sweeping on to victory. Gas-lamps fell upon Maurice's pince-nez—" What a night."

Stop the car; there was a policeman solitary. " Seen a procession ? "

" Procession. . . . ? procession ? "

Agh ! on again. They stopped half a mile farther at a pub. " Procession ? " Yes—yes; they directed him, three voices. He tried to disentangle. The driver had it. *He* knew; they could make a detour and meet it. Maurice was interested; was there time for a drink ? There must be. They took one with the taxi waiting, and another; they paraded forth and remounted; now for the last lap.

Taxi twisted and wriggled, slowed for enquiries. The driver knew his goal, hot on the scent. Shaken round corners, bad-tempered at last, they had made the detour. " It'll be along here, sir. Ten minutes perhaps. Less perhaps." The pavement was cold, and for them all out of space and time—but for Hugh, in his hallucination, it was a pin-point; he felt he knew it precisely. He felt he was in his wide elemental fluid, where all paths are alike.

" *What's* coming along ? "

" Here, this is a b-b-blurry hole."

He tossed them a word or two to chew on. It was critical. His hands were fumbling with excitement. His ears were sharp for the bleating of a band or the movement of feet. He must get this taxi off. They were looking up and down, whispering together. The taxi was gone; the thread was cut, he had them here at his mercy—them and their white shirts. Those last drinks had fidgeted them and made him ruthless.

Their faces were creased with cold; they looked at him hopelessly, mouths hanging open. " What an awful hole," complained Grimball, knocking his knees together.

" Huh, yes. It *is* awful, in more ways than one."

" What ? What d'you mean ? " They turned together, nodding.

" Mmm—I say, m'dear old fellow ; you can't expect . . ."

" Do you *know* this place, Brabant ? "

" Hoh, yes. Perfectly. I know all these parts well," he said, looking up and down—up and down—anxiously ; was death everywhere ? " Suppose we walk down this way," said he.

" Here, where's the place ? Where *is* it ? "

" Where's what ? " He herded them along like a pair of miserable fowls, a hand against each arm, and occasionally against a back. They crawled unprotesting from step to step.

" The *place*. Where you're bringing us."

" Why . . . here," he said.

" What ? " They spoke together ; there was whimpering, high-throated protest from Maurice. " Mmmm . . . m'dear old boy. I say, I say . . . mmm—not so quick."

" Kindly tell us what you intended . . ."

" So miserably cold. Let's go back."

" Consider it most . . . most uncalled-for, Brabant. Don't *push* me." Grimball suddenly stuck there, his long lips opening and closing, and glared uncertainly at Hugh. " What are you pushing for ? "

Balance—dumbness in an impotent triangle there ; they rocked, apprehensive now to a storm of flutterings. He was guilty of it all, sole perpetrator of the unspeakable street and the cold—producing somehow from his putrid interior every stench and scrap of icy wind. " Agh, come away," they said. " Yes, yes."

" No, no, no. Wait a second. I'm not fooling, really. See, Maurice, I didn't mean . . . explain to him. I was excited."

" Mmm—you see, my dear fellow, you have to consider. We don't necessarily enjoy the same things as you." Glasses glistened.

" I know. I know. I apologize most profusely. I'm really sorry for this little hitch."

" Yes, that's all right, old boy. And believe me we didn't want to blame you. Not at all."

" That's all very well," said Mr Grimball. " But I'd like an explanation from you, Brabant, as from one gentleman to another—a clear explanation as to what . . . as to what . . . I mean, to put it briefly, as I'd speak to a man I respected

. . . as to what you meant. As to whether your intentions, putting it concisely, were free from motives of . . ."

"Listen." At last—a drawn-out, thin chord, submerged at once beyond the houses, and a second and a third. "They're coming." Both of them were confused by it, looking one way and another. Sounds in this region had to them no clear identity.

"What?"

Who cared? He flung an arm right through theirs and marched them along. "Onward, boys. Left, right; left, right"—down the ringing street. More than one window was opening, life from the corpses. He marched them along. "Hear the band now? In step . . . left, right; left, right." They fell almost into a discipline, knowing nothing. Their feet took the music; they even straightened themselves.

Blagh—blagh. It was on them; in front came a sudden spray with rattling metallic drops in bags, behind crested up eternally a great red banner above drums and brass. The procession at its all-but end—puffing round to finality and dissolution. Ragged masses had livened up for the last few yards, greeting their homes with a shout; fresh torches were lighted; the banner-bearers heaved their aching shoulders—the bands flung in their last breath. It was launched up the street towards them, creeping, oceanic.

"What's this? God! Who are these?"

"The Revolution," he cried.

"What?" Drink magnified their world; they saw the tide's fringes beat everywhere against the houses—heard the trampling; they would have died where they stood. He seized their arms again.

"Don't give way. It's all right. Keep where you are." He was a fool not to have brought them sober; they were living in a madhouse. "I'm only speaking poetically. Keep still . . . they're quite harmless."

"Where are we?"

"I don't know. What's it matter? I wanted you to see them, to understand what I like about them. It's only an Unemployed procession. Don't annoy them; that's the great thing, don't annoy them."

The foam struck them with rattle of coins and innumerable cries. He saw the two faces jarred with sound. They frightened him. He couldn't stand it. He let slip all responsibility, and

turned about and poured coins in the bags, dancing with ecstasy. Anything might happen now. The band—till the drum was pounding against his own ribs, and with the pumping chords vast bubbles rose into his throat ; the houses reverberated behind him. He leaped to embrace. This pair of shaken brains should see and comprehend at last—his divinity, his identity with the swallowing sea ; they should comprehend the force within him and shrink to little specks of silence. He ran into the roadway, right against the band. " Fine. Fine. Good work." He grasped by the arm a cornet-player. " Good boys. What are you playing ? "

" Hey ? " The face, mottled with weariness spewed out for a breath its mouthpiece and the arm was snatched from his fingers. On, on—that fragment of a tide repelled him, not through choice, but because the tide subsumes its fragments. He was flung aside . . . came back as a gnat, laughing to them and nodding, longing for a hand to come out and clasp his. The banner passed. The vanguard felt his presence ; and the tongues melted themselves together in a hoarse cheer. His heart rose up ; the cheer trailed into derision, laughter that answered his own ; and the moving column took them from him and others followed with dumb, resentful eyes. He was slued aside by the points and projections that the column thrust out. They did not march, they walked ; they were not a battalion, ranked and constricted and armed by its very nervousness, but a natural inundation that straggled in fives and sixes, and ate its way unconcernedly from street to street. New banners loomed, new torches. He hovered, peering into faces. This would go on for ever ; it was the whole world here streaming past.

There was a face from the advancing multitude—staring and blunt—the adenoidal boy ; hesitation almost let it escape him. He seized a swinging hand and followed shaking it. " How goes it, lad ? How goes it, *Comrade ?* I've not seen you for weeks and weeks. . . . Come—come out. No ? Then I'll march here. How are you ? "

" Oh . . . not so bad. S'pose you're all right. Yes ? "

" Never seen anything like it. Magnificent spectacle you made marching up towards us. Triumphant torches flaring. Hammers coming down on the bourgeoisie. . . ." Breath rumbled out of the open mouth ; dulled eyes took him in, staring through a sleep. " I'm pleased to find you here. I

thought I might run across you, Comrade. How about the fight ? How about the Elections ? " Another shake ; did he dare to take an arm ? Where *were* those two ? Could they see him ? He awoke from vociferation . . . to no answer. No answer ? Dull eyes staring, mobility on and on. " I went to your street, to your house. I saw your sister . . . your little sister. It was she informed me you were out."

No answer ? He chilled ; and the puffed features suddenly broke. " Aw . . . aw, yes. Yes. I say, you'll come again. Yes ? See you later on. See you next week. Yes ? "

" Yes." His hand fell. He was dismissed. Two more ranks had already passed him by—three ranks—four. How had this happened ?

He stared motionless. Masses ground by him, file after file arising from the nowhere behind his back, seeming to rise horribly from his own bowels, bewildering. Another band was coming up ; it beat in heavier and heavier his neck—his skull. He turned round. Where were those two ? Had they seen ?—There, on the pavement, hanging to its edge like a couple of hunched beetles. They were just by him. They had crawled and jostled from point to point after him ; he was the only soul in that turbulence speaking one word of their tongue. Their faces were disinterested masks ; they waited with the pain still under their ribs for all this to pass away ; pass away and die in the distance and leave the street only a street.

He came to the pavement with the skin stretched and whitened over his face, as though bounced back from a wall ; and stood staring with a laughable rubber-ball expression into a pair of furies. How much had they seen ? How much there was to see, he hadn't a formulated thought. He was not of the multitudes—not of them, not loved by them, not even admitted by them. Alone he must confront this sodden, trapped, terrified hatred.

B'lonk ! B'lonk !—it was maddening ; and the torrential blare lifted every thought over the roof-tops. It had no message for him now ; his limbs jerked to a tune of their own. He snatched, without knowing it, the lapel of Grimball's coat and was disengaged—a venomous touch, a sickening touch like mud ; Grimball's face showed it. At once Hugh lost all care.

" What do you think of them ? You have no chance to see what it is, marooned a thousand miles off. You would have

vanished again without seeing, without understanding, if luck hadn't thrown us together. Maurice, of course . . . Maurice here . . . well, *he* doesn't know. Do you, my old son ? Poor old Maurice." He flung an arm round his shoulders—he couldn't think why. " Bless you, bless you. But now look here ; this is England as it is. Marvellous, terrible, *bursting*. We know. We know—wrapped up in it, stirred up in it like a stew. God, look at the banner. How many miles, d'you think ? You may not like all this, but it's no good blinding your eyes to it. Now, what I want to say is, what . . . what . . ."

Blot out of all bands, blot out of all motion suddenly ; an eddy back from the unseen van, spreading them into nines and tens over the roadway—a mighty shuffling and coughing. Pairs disengaged and drifted wide, vanished this way or that ; a banner was cautiously furled. Dispersal, no one knew whether back or forward. A crush into the fore and a band far away ; the crush deepened, hurried ; distant voices rose. The chant came down, in a gust nearer—in another gust almost there—in a third over them and then a flicker ; heads were bared. He tore off his hat. ". . . Then raise the scarlet standard high . . .," the chant lifted slowly, hung upon the note.

" Take your hats off. Better . . . better. See ? *I* can't be responsible. Everybody's done it. You must do it."

" This ritualism," smiled Maurice, indistinctly—and continued to smile. " Observances. . . ." He drew his hat slowly down over his face ; his pince-nez appeared above it. When his mouth came up, he was murmuring, " When in Rome. . ." He nibbled the brim. A face had thrust in close to them —Grimball's, all twisted ; he seemed about to explode into sobs. Suddenly he turned round, with his hat still tight on head—almost smashed his cheek into the brick wall. He stamped furiously. His hands were fumbling and fumbling in his pockets—couldn't find it ; he stamped again and dragged out cigarette-case and matches. He lit a cigarette, his face into the wall. " Come dungeon dark or gallows grim. . . ." It was a swell now, eternal ; there would be no life beyond it.

". . . Red flag flying here." Silence—the world returned ; winter '25 descended back damply. A shore of innumerable pebbles—talking, talking ; the sound of innumerable leaves —feet along the roadway. Grimball was back, cooled now

and crushing. One hand in his coat-pocket, the other languidly with cigarette.

" I've got to have a word with you . . . a word with you, Brabant. It's my duty to do it. I . . . I hope you'll take it in the serious spirit which it's meant to . . . to convey."

" Yes ? Yes ? Go on. What are you stopping for ? "

He brushed this aside. " You must give me ample opportunity. Let me warn you, you must not lend your brain—your organizing ability—to these mobs. I can see in a moment you're not really fitted to the task . . . h'm . . . not temperamentally adapted to it, if you pardon me saying so. I mean, it's obvious to me immediately with my experience."

Maurice was complaining. " Look here, you were very dictatorial just now. . . . "

" Take my advice, Brabant," cried Grimball. " You'll only find that these mobs will use the power you've given them to *trample* on you . . . on you. No gratitude—believe me, not a spark of it. I'm very sorry to upset your idea of human nature like this ; but I do it for your own good, you see, Brabant . . . for your own good."

". . . about my hat. I want you to repeat wha' you said about . . ."

" Oh, dry up, Ship ; can't you dry up ? What the hell did you want to take off your hat for ? "

" Yes, that's it. That's it. I demand to know . . ."

" Leave him to me, can't you ? " snapped Grimball. " Now, I assert with emphasis this sort of practice has got to discontinue. Immediately. And you'll be the first to thank me later on. I'm glad for your sake that chance has given me the opportunity . . ."

The precipice opened. Hugh felt it ; he shrank for a breath—and then burst into high laughter.

They glared. " What are you laughing at ? "

" Mmmm—crackling of thorns," said Maurice.

" What are you laughing at ? "

Hugh stamped. " You, you fool. Such an idiotic notion—that I'm responsible for all this, for these hundreds, bands, banners. Very complimentary. Wouldn't you like to believe it ? Not me. It's *them*—it's their force. Have you been hiding your head in a pail for seven years ? Don't you know this is happening ? "

" Well, if it isn't you, it's bloody fools like you—meddling

with things you don't understand. What have you learnt about organizing mobs of this sort ? You've never even held a commission. Bloody stamp-licker in an office. . . ."

Maurice was outraged. " Oh, no, no. No, no. Grim, Grim, . . . I say, I say, don't. Let's go."

" Get out. Don't be such a coward. I'm going to say now . . . affairs to-day want proper control, proper control ; want men of decency and devotion and real fineness." A sob crept into Grimball's voice ; he struggled with his features. " Men who really wish to steer things through these awful times . . . and know where to keep a firm hand. Men like steel. And when fools of your type butt in and. . . ." He turned away, took two paces and blazed round. " You'll have to be damn well put where you can't do any harm."

They were gone. How were they gone ? Hugh stood there with head stiff as plaster, eyes watching, lips adherent. They had said something else—he didn't know what—and gone. They had linked arms and one side-stepped into the gutter and the vanishing herds laughed. How much was drunkenness ? Did they remember ? Slowly he stretched his limbs and steadied his hat. Oh, triumphant life !—footsteps like leaves dispersing. It was done—within its shade we'll live or die. Dispersing to a thousand boxes of four walls, the smell of humans and bread, before slumber of dead creatures. Oh, triumphant life ! The crowds passed him, passed on, staring as they passed ; he longed to catch them—" I am part of you. I have struck a blow. I am incorporate in your dragging limbs." Dispersing to growl over a thousand bundles of loose sticks churned to a moment's blaze—of this step and that step, and of to-morrow and the day after. Tired and shaking with tiredness, wet boots that are no boots, the power that is gathering in all but silence.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Ten days later he suddenly set down his breakfast-cup and leaned his elbow on the table. " No. Let me be honest. Let me be honest at least. The thought of this coming week-end sickens me . . . h'm. Can I face it ? The old man—*he's* the

one I want to avoid ; that's strange." He sighed and turned his eyes to her. " You look tired, my dear."

" Yes."

" Don't be tired. I'm tired enough for two . . . h'm. What is it ? "

She said, " I feel the same hopelessness crawling up in me. Painful, painful. Eyes are sore and my hair drags at me." She shook it out and twisted her fingers. " There are moments like cold water, as when you came back and told me about Maurice and that Grimball ; but . . . it doesn't last. See ? "

He stared at her, creasing his brows up and down, and said after a while, " You're not . . . in the family way, I suppose ? "—and fidgeted carelessly with a knife.

" H'h . . . don't make me sob. It would be easier p'raps if I was. I almost wish I was."

" What is it you want ? "

" How many times have you asked me that ? "

" What answer do I get ? " said he, rising peevishly, and went to the fireplace. " Ah, well. At least let's endure together. I. . . . This week-end is a foul enough problem to face." He brooded. " Lord help me, but it worries me ; who would have supposed so ? " He came back and drank rapidly and took out watch and pipe. " Yes ? What do *you* think ? "

" M'm ? "

" What ? This week-end, how does it affect you ? You see," said he, rubbing his forehead, " it's the old man ; he's the uncertain factor. Don't you think so ? Though there's the possibility of a fresh chemical association in the whole family, that I simply can't predict. No one could. No one . . ."

" But you'll have some plan."

" Yes. Yes. I must have a plan. One feels restless for a moment. It's time I was off. The old man is the problem. Yes."

" D'you think he really matters ? " said she.

" What ? He matters if he's down there, doesn't he ? Down there, I mean, *in* the house. It would be absurd obscurantism to deny it. Matters ? of course, he does." He vanished.

She sat waiting ; he reappeared buttoning his coat and murmuring, " One's in the dark about it all. What vision or recollection would they have carried off the other night ? What have they told each other ? To say *plan* . . . yes, but are they

going to be volatile or explosive or merely sluggish ? One goes on speculating." She waited again dull as a goldfish for shapes to hover at the bowl's mouth. Here he was, with hat on and sucking at his pipe—" No. It's the old man that worries me. He doesn't belong to my universe. You understand—he won't realize things in *my* terms or in *my* principles of logic. That," said he, grinding his pipe-stem moodily, " is the deepest pit of all. I shall have to talk to him about . . . several matters . . . h'm. Is it a fearful thought that I wish he were dead—drowned and cold ? One must be honest. Well, good-bye, sweetheart ; take care of yourself."

She didn't reply. After he had faded away, she was meditating how like he and his father were to one another, not in features, but rather in drifting expressions and a gesture or so. She woke herself up painfully and yawned. This struggle of his was beyond her—a dim struggle in a picture-frame. She began to clear the breakfast-table, certain that she had only to endure patiently, and he would perform miracles for her ; there was no other way.

But he, hurrying for his 'bus, pondered the mystery of change. Before he knew it change had come. These Masses —almost casually he had sought for contagion with them, asking merely for strength ; and suddenly, in a few days, that contagion had taken on a life of its own and was carrying him and his world forward into fresh situations—incalculable scenes. They refused to give him strength alone ; they compelled him into love and hatred and sacrifice ; they moulded his very reason.

A moment later—of such tissue is time—and he was there in the car leaning back. Mid-afternoon of Saturday with nothing yet clarified, and Surrey distant fields circling back like wheel-spokes. They had waited ten minutes in the station. It was a cold and rugose country day with low clouds in furrows on the horizon.

" Did he tell you why he was late ? " she whispered.

" Yes. He did. The old man forgot to order it for us till almost time."

" Oh, well. It's come anyway."

" What ? Yes, but *forgot* . . . he couldn't have been exactly letting his mind dwell on the pleasure of our company. A fine start. What's the matter ? "

" M'm ? "

" I thought you were looking surprised. He sent his heart-felt apologies. Irene and Maurice have arrived, at midday, with the kid."

" Paul ? Oh ? "

He was silent. He glanced at the dumb chauffeur on his right and felt his home rush towards him ; he had no images. " Eve," he said thickly, leaning at her ear.

" Yes ? "

" It's a complicated business this. I mean, honestly . . . if I'm uncertain of you, and how you're likely to behave, it makes things a thousand times more difficult. What do you *feel* about it ? If I could only understand."

She did not answer. They hunched there, rooks on the back of fate. She jerked up her neck irritably. " Oh, my dear, I don't want to have to do anything. I want to watch you doing it."

" Yes, that's all right. Still. . . . What I mean is, don't expect anything sudden and phenomenally dramatic ; because that's not the way of life. Surely you understand. I do beg you, don't try to force everything into a dramatic framework."

She felt it feeble ; she wanted to sob. He was pulling his scarf, pettishly, from one position to another. She soothed herself. " No, darling, I'll try. Only I can't wait for ever. I've been waiting."

" For *what ?* "

" And I have to find my own way after all. I'm not going to promise, if that's what you suggest. You've no right. . . . You mustn't limit me."

" I don't want to ; I never have done so. But I'm only begging you. . . ." The open gates and gravel under the wheels ; evergreens dipped, lawns spread suddenly—the house-door. Strange and sour familiarity in every vista. The house-door remained shut, to gape in a moment and breathe out on them the odour of its fresh emotions. They descended. She stood wiping her eyes after the cold air, and wondered that they were so tired. She felt a bitter little cat's anger with him —that he had no surprise waiting for her. She had expected more than this.

It was a house of studied emptiness. There were souls in it, of course ; but one felt subtle pumps at work, drawing off all contagion. " Studied " he thought it,—so much so that, when they reached the passage outside their room, he turned

and laughed half-hysterically for a moment. Later descending he had a new sensation—that the truly vital elements, his mother and Irene and Maurice, were anxious to avoid him; they were careful not to pass on the stairs, not to be left alone. Maurice ?—in a chair by the drawing-room fire, remembering obviously all that could be remembered but somnolent. Something had been communicated; but how much and precisely to whom, Hugh must not know. There were to be others.

"Oh, a larger party ? I hadn't heard . . ."

"Mr Margarietson."

"Old Margarietson ? Him ? I haven't seen him for years. Does he often come down ? "

"Fairly often."

"What ? and Laura Franklin, too ? Really ? " His eyes strayed to Irene; this was a vague friend of hers. No one ever suggested *he* should invite his friends, by the way. "And Grimball ? "

"No. No, not this time."

A fresh memory—"Paul's down ? Where is he ? "

Irene conveyed—"Upstairs, in the room he usually has, with Nurse."

"And Father ? " He looked round.

"Out in the stables." Several seemed to explain together, eagerly—like a bubble near the lips bursting into sight. "He's been out in the stables all the afternoon since lunch." Why so intense about it ? Did they, too, feel this house had its soul drawn out of it, then ?

"Why in the stables ? "

"With the gardeners and a carpenter, putting up a new cage for what he calls. . . . What ? Cat-bears." There was laughter on a higher pitch than justified. "Cat-bears . . . cat-bears."

"I know. Small reddish beasts. I've seen them. So he's superintending the construction ? Isn't it cold out there ? "

"Oh, no, stoves . . . for the tree-frogs and the kinkajous."

"Ah, I forgot. Yes." He leaned against the sofa; shapes hummed to and fro. He filled a pipe, thinking with agitation of his father; and when he lifted eyelids a moment, he felt the same agitation must be worrying at them all, they were so fretful. He laughed sickly to himself.

After these greetings, there was aimless dispersion till tea-

time. Irene was in the nursery. He himself—a loose ghost from room to room, turning over a book, pausing half-way downstairs to brood out of a window; he thought once or twice—" I believe they're *nervous* of me, actually more timid than malicious. Good God!" In the meanwhile there were conversations not known to him; he threaded them, as it were. Little links were established, little meshes knitted up.

Eve and Miss Dallas were in the billiard-room; Miss Dallas had peered in. " Alone here? I thought I heard the click of balls."

" Oh, I'm no good at it. I had to do something with myself not to go up like a puff o' smoke. Every one seems to have evaporated."

" And left you alone, my dear Evelyn? T't, t't . . . I offer you their apologies. For amends, what about fifty up before tea? "

" Oh, I don't know. Do you want to? Oh, it's very charming of you . . . er . . . Aunt Mildred, and I appreciate it; but I . . ."

" Well, suppose you lead off," said Miss Dallas.

" Missed clean. I told you I was hopeless, I *told* you so."

" I'm waiting for you to begin again, my dear."

" Well, then . . ."

" Excellent. And now." There was a spinning silence.

" Aunt Mildred."

" My dear? "

" Look, doesn't it give you a start when I call you that? I'm not used to it. . . . Is that queer? "

" No." Miss Dallas moved round the table.

" Aunt Mildred."

" *Yes*, my dear? "

" Here. Come here. No, no, no, don't just stare at me, please. Straight now. You know 'em better than I do. Why does Mrs Brabant treat me like this? She never was overwhelming, certainly; but to-day. Almighty God! . . . Excuse me swearing if you don't like it. . . . She looks at me as though she expected spots to come out on me at any moment. You can tell her so if you like, but I'm not going to stand it. She's never wanted to know anything about me, always dropped me into a kind of genteel pigeon-hole. I hate this lack of curiosity; but to-day she's scarcely even genteel. What's the matter? "

" H'm. Well, my dear, I think you must allow for twists of maternal temperament, of which we are both . . . so far . . . without experience. Perhaps fortunately. I imagine—a kind of inverted form of the stage mother-in-law—'m ? Lucia's personality is a complex one and frequently expresses itself in judgments quite her own ; in this case I can say, my dear Evelyn, speaking for myself and my knowledge of the family, *quite* her own . . . surely."

" Oh, yes, yes. It's very sweet of you. Don't pat me or I shall sob. Yes, but even you don't really. . . . I wish I had some of your capacity for believing in people."

" My stroke," said Miss Dallas. " Shall I go on ? "

" Yes, yes. I want to gather my thoughts. I want to ask you. . . . Yes, go on. Later."

In the drawing-room Maurice sat, finding himself alone—he was startled but still somnolent ; would one do better to fade upstairs for the time being ? The door opened—his mother-in-law. " All by yourself, Maurice ? "

" H'm . . . ah . . . h'm, yes. I don't know where they've hidden themselves. Oh, Irene is in the nursery, I think. Yes."

She leaned over, turning the coals ; he sat forward with a rigid blinking attention—hands pantherine on the chair-arms. " This rather degrading and objectionable affair *has* upset me, Maurice. *So* unlike anything I could possibly have expected. I do want to ask you—don't blame Hugh too much."

" No, no, Mother . . . er . . . dear, absolutely not. Really. I mean, I always have thought Hugh is an excellent fellow. Don't get an exaggerated view, please. You see, Geoffrey Grimball, first-class fellow, of course, insinuated rather incorrect colouring into the whole business. Yes. I mean, he doesn't quite see the difference between a joke, a trifle in bad taste perhaps, and . . . well, you know."

" I'm not excusing what happened, Maurice ; but I just want quietly, in confidence between the two of us, to ask you not to think too hardly of poor Hugh himself."

" Oh, yes, yes. Quite. I've been trying—well, you understand—to drop a hint or so to Irene."

" You see, she is so devoted to me, Maurice, and she can't bear to think that Hugh . . ."

" Oh, quite."

" She gets rather concentrated ideas, between ourselves."

"Oh, I know. I know. A darling girl, of course, but . . ."

" Oh, of course, my dear boy."

" From *my* point of view old Hugh is clever, really interesting ; not a man of the world, perhaps—rather a man of a world of his own. Huh ! huh ! "

" But easily led into thoughtlessness — dreadful thoughtlessness," said she.

" Oh, I don't know. . . ."

" I'm afraid so, Maurice. There are forces and influences that can intrude themselves on a young man's life, over which his mother has little control. I've had to resign myself to it since . . . since he first went to school. I cannot control them unfortunately, but," said Mrs Brabant, with martyred lips, " no one can expect me to sympathize with them. No one." Silence, and a turning of two pairs of hands in front of the blaze ; Maurice was gratified—but on second thoughts this kind of thing infected him with a moaning discomfort. He wished he could be left out of it all. His stomach yearned towards an uneventful life. The door opened again ; it was tea.

With tea came the reassemblage. The gong sounded. " Mr Brabant ? Would they see . . . in the stables probably ? " Suspense, while the staff reorganized unseen and ringed in these lost souls.

" What did you say ? "

" Mr Brabant says, Madam, he'll go upstairs to wash and change ; he won't worry you ; he'll have a tray in the study."

" Oh."

" Oh, up in the study ? "

Hugh breathed quietly—up in the study for a while, eh ? He sat and played with a tea-cake ; the conversation in the room was like the sound of cheap violins touched now and again mistakenly.

Amid this there came the fresh arrivals, last car-load of the day, the reverberations in the hall were smoothly borne by every one from behind hot steam of tea-cups. Miss Franklin entered at last—Mr Margarietson—with their husks peeled off them and cleansed and emerging.

Mr Margarietson weighed slowly the sofa next to Hugh. He was like a short and plumpened bird of prey—rusty-grey hair and the paunched deportment of old kings. Mr Brabant had known him long, a survival from sombre Club-nights and

City-days. They still met with an inert viscosity of temperament, neither loving the other, but both allured to quietness. Mr Margarietson looked out on the world ; in every forecast of national and racial fluidities he ventured to think that his own squat figure would yet be riding grimly upon the surface ; and to this he added a fathomless courtesy—a stream of good manners. He began, " Well ? You are still in the City, Hugh ? "

" Yes."

" Yes. We must foregather sometimes. Don't hesitate to suggest any way I can be of assistance. Young fellows like you must make use of us seniors to safeguard your interests. One can't expect to protect oneself alone in times like these. You don't see my brothers, I suppose ? "

" In . . . er . . . Lombard Street ? No. No, I don't."

" I rarely take part in the business nowadays. It goes on just as well without me, as well as one could have anticipated. No, I prefer to do my little occasional work for the Financial Journals. I am more use in that way, it appears to me. Excuse me a moment. . . . May I put down your cup, Irene ? I believe in looking after the mothers of families." He sank again out of nodding enquiries. " Ha. H'm. Have you a family yet, Hugh ? "

" No, we haven't any children."

" No ? It demands an effort in these days, I'm aware. But I think it's necessary. It is a whim of mine that *our* type—yours and mine—is not the sort that should be permitted to decrease. It's a mistake to assume that, because these Islands are overpopulated, we must inevitably apply it to our own class in particular. . . . Excuse me, again. I know Miss Dallas will allow me to handle that plate of cakes."

Hugh was tickling with apprehensions ; he had not imagined the presence of Mr Margarietson, and wouldn't in any case have conceived of it as having so gross an effect on him. It upset the balance of power ; it appeared to wriggle its way stealthily like intrusive yeast. His own body wriggled in sympathy. After a while he made an excuse, rose up and vanished. He could go no further ; whatever it revealed to him, he must get a glimpse at the old man's face. Even, he thought, it would be possible to have the first word, to justify, sentimentalize, postpone. A crisis would be unendurable. He hurried across the hall.

The study, its own peculiar world, was like dropping fathoms down ; it was lighted and warm, heavy-curtained ; scarcely a leaf stirred. One died, awoke, and said, " Is this death ? " The silent old man read, lifting his eyebrows behind a dark table—a tea-tray of soiled plate and cup was swept to one side. " Hullo, Hugh."

" Hullo. Just dropped up to say how-do."

" Yes."

Hugh seated himself in the large chair behind the door and relit his pipe. They mused at each other through their tobacco-smokes ; words would come. He thought—" Isn't he more wrinkled ? And his cheeks are hollower surely. Worried about something ? " He sighed anxiously and rubbed his hands. Mr Brabant leaned back.

" Well," said he, " so you're down here again."

" Yes. One is drawn down somehow into the family circle. It's a magnetism over which one hasn't much control."

" Oh, quite so. Quite so." He watched his son's eyes, expecting something that didn't come.

" I suppose," said Hugh, " that as one gets on and has children grown-up and all that, this kind of domestic aggregation comes in waves ? M'm ? "

" Ha, yes," said his father, more comfortably. " You've about hit it. That *is* the style of thing. In waves. Not a very neat arrangement. Birds always seem to me to do it better . . . but our mutual acquaintance, *homo sapiens*, thinks otherwise. You'll find it just the same when you're my age."

" Oh, I anticipate it. Especially if I have any kids."

" Ye-es. That is the point, of course. You know, if you had children, *you* wouldn't feel any desire to come down here."

" Do you think so ? What about Irene ? "

" Oh, h'h, that's not the same thing. A girl likes to talk domesticities with her mother. I can understand *that*." He speculated awhile on his son with shy brows. " Have a fill of this tobacco. Er . . . talking about children, I suppose you, for example, would find it rather a tight fit financially—rather a squeeze, if you plunged into paternity ? It didn't really strike me. . . ." He paused.

" Oh, well, there's plenty of time to consider it."

" Oh, quite so. But I mean, a fellow likes to feel himself free and so forth."

Hugh shrank away. The dark money-question loomed over

him. He shrank and mumbled, making his tones idle. "We'll see. . . . Plenty of time. How's Mother? She invited us to come down this week-end. I suppose she *is* the chief compulsion that draws us together like this. She enjoys seeing the family reunited occasionally."

"Oh, of course, I can sympathize with *that*," said Mr Brabant. "The women of a family like to get together now and then. It's natural." He puffed again comfortably, gazing at the cornice. "And, of course, they don't quite realize that every one doesn't feel the same. They go for rather broad outlines, y'know . . . they like to be able to draw their conclusions easily. They prefer a man to ticket himself obviously . . . piece of gold braid or a stethoscope sticking out of his pocket. They like a City man to wear a topper and a Labour leader to wear hobnails."

"Yes. Yes," said Hugh. "And you know, they get most extravagant notions about one's political colour. They imagine that, just because. . . ." He broke off. His throat suddenly constricted. He felt that he could dare no more than a postponement. "Yes." He gripped the pipe-bowl to steady his fingers. "Have you seen Irene yet?"

"Only at lunch."

"Old Margarietson's come. Did you know?"

"I must drift along down. I like having Margarietson . . . don't you like him? He doesn't know anything about business; don't take his word. He always fancies himself as a raven, does old M. Has he been saying . . . h'm." A knock and the door opened; it was Irene.

Hugh in his chair was for a moment unseen; and then subtly the whole balance of her figure shifted. "Oh . . . *you*'re here?" she said.

"Yes. Didn't you think so?"

"Yes, I did. I didn't imagine you anywhere else."

"Won't you come in and shut the door," said Mr Brabant.

"Haven't I? Sorry. . . . And how's father? I hadn't a moment with you at lunch. How are the cat-bears? You've been putting up a cage?"

"All of us are flourishing, thanks."

"Good." She sat down, glanced at Hugh and away; the grim watch-dog couched silent, hands on chair-arms. "You've seen Paul, haven't you, Father? He's frightfully fit. You're wonderfully warm up here; such a raw night outside. How

. . . does mother seem to you ? Is she quite. . . ." She glanced again at the grim silence. " You're looking very critically at me, Hugh. Is anything wrong ? How does Mother strike *you*, then ? "

" Eh ? " He took his pipe slowly away. " She seems peculiarly fit to me."

" Well, she doesn't to *me*. Not at all as well as she has been. Worrying over something."

" What vexatious stuff ! " replied her brother. " What has she got to worry over ? She wouldn't start to worry at her time of life, unless some busybody began to inject ideas into her head. I know mother.'

" No, I'm sure you're not right," said Mr Brabant legally. " You see, er . . . Irene, your mother does sometimes strike people as distracted by matters that don't really trouble her at all. It's a personal mannerism that some people find charming."

" I'm not some people."

" Eh ? Oh, no, I didn't suggest it. But when you've been apart from a person for a few weeks, you . . . one often misunderstands and forgets mannerisms of this kind. I think Hugh's quite right. I don't want you to get worried over your mother's health. She's really very flourishing."

She found no reply—and leaned her cheek upon her palm. Silence dropped over them like a damp cloth ; their skins irritated ; it was a conclave without meaning, without possible fruition. This carefully created male barrier was, for her, impassable ; she sat hating Hugh. He watched ; he knew he could only postpone. Mr Brabant lowered his head, like an old whitened stag, moving his eyes from one to the other.

At last, " Well, what have you two been talking about ? " said the woman with a strain.

Mr Brabant waited and found that speech was left to him. " Talking about ? Let me see. Just referring to old Margarietson, I believe. What do *you* think of him ? Rum old bird, m'm ? I suppose he doesn't work off his gloomy forebodings on you. No, I'm sure he doesn't ; he believes in protecting the ladies from the approaching dissolution o' the British Empire and from old brother Russki. . . ." He looked at the door. His wife came in. She too did not see Hugh for a breath. Then he noticed it—the way she stiffened, without a fraction of change, into a statue ; lips frowned. She had fallen,

a drop of intense fluid, suddenly into a void ; the group was meaningless to her. She drifted to the fireplace and rubbed her fingers together. Her husband's eyes followed her round. " Margarietson's come, I hear. How is he ? I suppose really I ought to . . drop down. Eh ? "

" Later on. Yes, I think so."

" I will. I'll get ready now." He sighed ; his world had come to him and he might as well escape by submitting to it.

She turned—with a laugh like a dry croak—taking a cigarette from her case. " You three are very cosy up here ; doesn't it seem quiet and shut away ? I never realized your study was . . . m'm, may I have a match, Arthur ? Do you know—how curious it seems—I don't know *when* we were last together as a family group, all alone. How rare it is. It may seem an atrocious thing to say, but I do feel . . . I can't help feeling . . . that when you young people have grown up, it means intruders coming in. Inevitable. Huh ! " They stared up at her, three numbed children, waiting. " I didn't know you were all up here together. Hugh dear, how are *you* getting on ? I seem to see less of you than anyone. You've taken to brushing your hair in a new way ; do you think it's as becoming ? I used to like you better. . . ." He felt himself reddening ; her voice was a soothing pervasive warmth ; it drew his blood to his skin. " I suppose the friends you have now prefer it."

" Friends ? "

" But I *did* admire you the other way. You don't mind me saying that ? And do you remember when you used to wear a bow tie ? Do you remember that set of bow ties I gave you ? "

" Yes, I have them." He cleared his throat. " Yes, rather."

"You looked very nice in them—artistic. You *are* a bit of an artist really, Hugh. You know a good many . . . artists, don't you, and writers ? What are they like nowadays ? It's so long since I. . . . It's rather fashionable to be what they call socialistic in that set, isn't it ? The young women wear red handkerchiefs on their heads ? "

" I don't think so," he said staring, and " I don't think so at all," said Irene, fidgeting her necklace of beads up and down, up and down. " And I've often mixed with that crowd. They're quite sensible on the whole. Quite harmless. They're *creative ;* they admire modern art and literature in the proper

way. They don't find fault with it all . . . like Hugh is always doing."

" Huh. I don't think Hugh is altogether wrong about *some* modern art, if what I've seen is at all typical. Your father had sent him—where is it, Arthur ?—that post card that Colonel . . . h'm, sent you to look at. I thought it was disgusting."

Mr Brabant lowered his head. " I slipped it somewhere, Lucia. I don't quite know where, just at the moment."

" It was by a person called Silberstein. In a church. . . ."

" Eve," said Irene, like a trap.

" Yes. Isn't it an unnatural thing ? So ill-balanced and meaningless. Something very destructive about it. That's what Hugh objects to, I think."

" It's one of the few things I do fancy," said Hugh.

" Oh . . . how strange. I should have thought it was most disturbing."

He snapped at her, his nerves aching. " What's wrong with it ? Tastes differ."

" Well, I don't know, dear. Your taste seems to have altered at any rate. I admit I don't often go to church ; but I should find this kind of figure would worry me dreadfully, if I wanted to sit and meditate in peace. Peaceful meditation. . . ." She breathed out a long cloud of smoke and into it pronounced languidly, " Eve ? Not at all *my* conception of Eve. . . ." The name hissed through each of their minds like an electric spark.

" Worry ? What is there to *worry* you ? It's original, not traditional at all ; it doesn't represent anything as *you*'re accustomed to it ; but what of that ? A good many things happen in life to which one isn't accustomed. One has to get hardened to surprises and try to understand them. It's the only way."

Irene's wrinkled eyes gazed as out of a sphinx-head. " Queer how you always are fascinated towards what hurts and upsets most other people, Hugh. I suppose . . . I suppose that affair the other night with Maurice . . ."

" No," said the mother sharply. " No, I'm sure Hugh doesn't really believe all he says. My dear, you don't *sound* convinced ; you don't. You sound—please forgive me if I'm libelling you—as if you got those ideas from *someone else*." He leaned forward flushing ; his lips seemed to dry bare. " Think over your words, my dear," she added. " I must be an idiot, for they don't convey anything to me."

A scatter—a confusion of voices—" Oh, he means it all right," and " Who should I get it from ? Can't I be responsible for my own. . . ." " It's just the same as that affair the other night when you took Maurice. . . ." Mr Brabant had risen ; they stared at him. " I think we ought to go down. Anyhow *I* ought to. Er . . . the others. Margarietson. Don't you think so ? " The teeth of the very room seemed on edge. They had all risen, with limbs stiff—why stiff after a few minutes ?—as if out of etherization. It was postponed—only that. Hugh turned the door-handle ; the women loitered out together, in advance ; he heard their low voices down the winding passage. His father came round the table and stood with fingers on the switch.

" No." He shook his head. " You all miss the real point. It's only waste of time tearing round about that statue—or whatever you artistic gentry call it. People *don't* agree on these matters and I don't suppose they ever will. It pleases the fellows that paid down the spondulics ; that's all you can sanely say about it. I don't know. . . ." He shrugged and looked at his pipe. " I wonder what that girl meant . . . about your mother getting worried. Has she said anything to you about it ? "

He lifted eyes curiously to his son's face ; and, gazing close at him, he gave a sudden jerk. He frowned, opened his mouth to speak and closed it again, and sighed. It was a moment like a stretched wire.

Then he said, " Your *wife* . . . er. . . . " He struggled to remember the name. " I suppose she's down here, too ? "

" Eve ? Yes."

" Eve." He flicked out the light and took his son's arm in quivering fingers. " I must come down and see her. I hope she's comfortable. I hope her room has been made quite comfortable. I mustn't forget these things."

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

At night, dissection. Night and the double bed-chamber, the verges of eternity, are for dissection. Life grows stale, lays itself upon the anæsthetic table. The struggle is over for a

while. This is why many isolated rooms are made in one house. Hugh crawled up out of a social evening—rancid and tenuous as seaweed—dominated by the presence of strangers. Eve was in bed already. In bed? How? "I *thought* I missed you; but where did I imagine you? In some corner, some lavatory? When did you say good-night?"

"I didn't."

"Oh. . . . Difficult, difficult, my dear girl. It was tiresome, but why not go through the mere form? *I* didn't know, I might have invented a dozen reasons, and here you were curled up in a ball. Well. . . ." Recovering at the looking-glass he purred over the body of the day; for all the irritation in the world he could not forgo this, wasn't she his familiar—his unashamed nudity? "Ah, well, that's over then. What to make of it all, eh? How much have they told one another? Questions to be asked when one has time to think for the answer. Irene seems curiously awed; yes, indeed, awed. Isn't that a queer discovery? She has turned nervous at last. It's suddenly gone out beyond the depths she expected or thought about. With, of course, spasms of desperate vexation with me when she's in safe company."

"I believe," he said again, "she wants to say something to me. I saw her looking at me several times to-night . . . distracted kind of expression. Do you know, I shouldn't be surprised if I've jumped into the position of superman at last. What the devil did they tell her that evening?"

"You know," he said, "she struck me as coming up to the old man's study without being sure what she was going to say to him. It's a fact. It was just instinctive. Did she realize I was in there? No . . . no, I'm certain she didn't. Like a flustered young cow running up to the old bull, wanting to rub up close to him and smell whether he would drive away the nasty nightmares. Now mother, mother I don't really understand. She doesn't want to blame her darling son. The story *she's* got hold of is that I've been led astray; bad companions. . . ."

"By me, of course. What else do you imagine?"

"What?" said he, turning.

"Good heavens, you irritate me. You . . ."

"Won't you take your face out of the pillow. I can't hear."

"I'm saying, your mother seizes the opportunity to put the whole blame on me. Now, d'you see? Why else d'you think

I ran away to bed ? I can't stand it. She takes every chance to let me see."

" My dear *girl*, you exaggerate . . ."

" Oh, do I ? Who else then is there ? And what's more, let me tell you that Miss Dallas recognized it too ; and when *that* old lump of human charity sees something wrong, it's pretty sure to be very far-gone, indeed. Look for yourself." He was silent. " Do you like the blame to be heaped on to me ? " Still silent. " Does it satisfy your sense of self-importance ? Are you contented with it ? "

" No, I'm not. Besides, it's not true. Mother's ridiculous ; I'll tell her . . ."

" No, you won't. I don't want you to."

" What ? Why not ? You know you haven't influenced me."

" Is your pride hurt, then ? Do you *mind* her thinking I've had just a little influence over you ? "

" Of course not," said he. " But . . . what d'you want me to do about it ? One moment you expect marvels, miracles . . . my whole family put into its place, presented to you on chargers. Then you say—' No, don't . . . nothing . . . hush it all up.' What about it ? "

" I don't want any miracles from you, thanks. Any more. As it is, I never did want miracles of that sort—heads on chargers ; it wouldn't help at all. I shall have to find something. Oh, come to bed."

" What are you going to do ? I mean . . . don't spoil everything for a silly whim."

" Do put out the light. It burns into my eyes."

He crept into bed and silently tried to sleep. The thought of his father returned to him through a glass and his voice as among waters. He turned and sweated, throwing bare arms across his pillow.

World, inconveniently wheel-shaped, rolled them into daylight and breakfast ; rain fell—eyes looked out on smudge and were smudge themselves. The house-party was a minced one, scraps and ends of people, never coagulating into a society ; they were evidently determined to get through the week-end without doing so. Here was the drawing-room, very tall, very unfitted for dull morning lights ; a thin fire still smelling of wood and with backs of legs as near it as permissible, Mr Margarietson behind the Sunday paper. Mr

Brabant sat smoking. The Margarietson function in this week-end pie was revealed to Hugh—to mask, to sustain, to medicate the old man through this family ordeal. For that cause had he been invited to the house.

The whole was reduced to an under-water world, wherein floating faces came and dispersed—smooth with manners, fish-eyed with constraint; it was cold interlacing gentility; and he went about, feeling as sure as he could be that nothing was going to happen, because everybody hoped nothing would happen. Then he twisted his glance doubtfully to Eve, perched on the sofa helping—or hindering—Aunt Mildred with an embroidered tea-cosy; Eve in black with red beads that were like red drops falling into water. She was the unknown, the extraneous, that might splash in; she was the incalculable.

Mr Margarietson looked coldly at him in passages, and might conceivably have heard something by this time. He remembered Mr Margarietson from the former years and certain feeble crossings of swords—about what? For one thing '19 and Russia; and then '21 and wages; but Hugh had no figures. Figures—his opponent's sword had a swift statistical point. Hugh remembered, perspired and scowled.

Morning went away. At midday an intruder, the small boy, enveloped from his nursery and shy in a little grey jumper—little grey knickers. Hugh greeted him impeccably, with their last contact vivid in his mind; and the others, too, greeted him no less impeccably. Eve's turn came. Absolutely faultless. She might have had no thoughts at all about the child; —a buoyant young aunt. He was relieved. The house knitted itself for a moment listlessly together, circling and recircling its own innocence; till the child was removed, and faces again grew vague and globular.

Luncheon drew near; Maurice returned out of nowhere in particular and felt his stomach healthily absorbent; gods had given their beloved peace; he was gratified. "A short drink. . . ." Why not? Margarietson would have one. "Hugh . . . eh? and mother?" They drank on the hearth-rug before the matured fire, three upright men.

From far away Miss Franklin's woodpecker laugh—punctuation of the morning's pool—again ruffled surfaces. "Mmm—do you still go and watch the boxing, Margarietson?" said Maurice.

" I do, when I have opportunity. I believed it my duty to keep myself fit in the past ; and I believe it my duty to support other people in it now." Hugh listened—smiled with polite interest. " You fellows ought to keep fit," said Mr Margarietson. " It's the privilege of culture. A lot of these chaps you see in the ring are costers and bricklayers and that kind of thing. You'd be well-advised to have *some* notion of self-defence."

Hugh smiled.

" Ye-es," said Maurice. " I'm a pretty good shot, y'know ; yes."

" Just as well." Hugh's turn shortly. Mr Margarietson emptied his glass. " I saw twelve rounds the other day between one of our chaps and a Spanish fellow ; perhaps you read about it. The Spaniard was a fine fighter, and won, you remember, on points."

Hugh smiled again and asked casually in the group of males — " The Spaniard won, eh ? How did that happen ? "

Mr Margarietson turned his eyes. " You said . . . ? "

" How did it happen ? I mean . . . *how* did he beat the English fellow ? "

" I suppose, Hugh, he managed to hit him rather more frequently. That is the usual way." He looked squatly at Hugh. Maurice's laughter like an expulsion of corks ; others enquiring, " What's the joke ? " Agh ! Humiliation, a watery smile. A knife's edge only lay between that houseful and bitterest recriminations, hatred in thin, fierce air.

But the afternoon shone suddenly like glass ; the gauze of rain ceased to fall ; and Hugh found himself later strolling alone under the chestnuts. A few sodden old leaves still lay scattered, skin-tight on paths and grass ; the lawn was recovering, lifting with a faint suspiration. He lounged over its wet stretches and round the alligator pool ; crystal-clean, so that the two small alligators lay modelled under water. He stood and spread his arms wide. Decorum within the garden hedges ; beyond them a church-bell like some tinkle, far away. Into the whole world's tank—as far as this garden went and its sky—fresh stainless water had been poured since lunch. Where were the others ? He was vague ; he thought some had vanished into other corners of the garden or along the lanes. They did not trouble about him or he about them.

He would see them if they came, clear-modelled, alligators all. The house was silent, giving up nothing. Shrunken home, shrunken sanctuary. He had no part in it now. It was like a doll's house ; he could lift the roof up and gaze upon it—first one room, than another. As contrast, the million lairs of the proletariat, mere pores in the swelling mud, like the soil that steamed faintly beneath him ; but energy gathered in the mud and fed itself, croaked in the mud, nozzled through the mud. Gentility grew pale. A plague of frogs ; the water turns to blood-red. Would it be the first-born, too, the children, too ? *He* did not care ; *he* had no child. Savagely he watched the sacrifice—resigning all—family, children, restfulness—for the fierce pleasure of watching. Let it come. That paper-seller by the gate had said, "They drive you forward and you drive them forward . . . from conflict to conflict in the war of Classes." Let them ; let it come ; and there, with that moment, she was coming—Irene herself—towards him across the gravel. He stared mutely. She was lengthening and bulking like a figure on the cinematograph—of no more meaning than that. The absurd interval while two creatures glide decorously towards one another. She hesitated, glanced at sky and trees, patted hair. She's like a cat, he thought. Come along ; come to it. Cat-like, with large eyes, with her kitten somewhere in the background ; *she* had a child ; *she* was committed to futurity.

" Well ? A private interview this time . . . eh ? "

" Don't be ridiculous, Hugh. . . . Um-m-m. . . . Oh, t-ch ! How careful you are to give every conversation a wrong twist from the start. Why *do* you delight in it ? " She swallowed. " You see ? "—and pouted.

" H'h, *you* seem eager enough to interfere in my choice of conduct. What is it to you, eh, what opinions I care to hold ? Are they to be turned over and fingered and sneered at just because you . . . ? I'm tired of it."

" Really, Hugh . . . don't be vindictive from the start ; don't drive all possibility of a word to you beyond the bounds of conception. Why do it ? "

" Oh, so I suppose you haven't touched lucky elsewhere ; haven't found the sympathy and support for your tittle-tattling. Father wasn't having any ? M'm ? "

" D'you know," she said, " I wouldn't mind understanding you. You're a riddle. One would almost think I had

some guilty secret about you . . . that you'd committed a murder. . ."

Danger-points, like a stab ; he saw speculation in large blue-green eyes, gently blinking at him ; he evaded and dropped on to intense gravity, with a fine chill languor in the voice.

" My dear Irene, what is it to do with you—my decision to . . . link myself with a Movement that means change and . . . well, yes, *change*, let us say. Change and utter novelty. It involves new relationships, new valuations. Do you *see?* I am hardened now, determined. And if you imagine I've built up this determination on a washy bog of a theory, then. . . . I must simply beg you to believe that I know what I'm about. You might as well realize it yourself ; that the time has come when this arrangement of society will cease to exist. Simply cease. And another grow up in its place. It may be a kind of superb exaggerated self-protection in me ; but I prefer to be on the side of the civilization that is coming in, rather than of that which is feebly tottering out. Oh, I know there are risks in it and unpleasant clashes ; and it must sound a very queer distorted sort of pride. Perhaps it is. I can't help it ; it suits me."

She watched, breasts lifting a little ; she twisted her rings once or twice round fingers. " H'm . . . you've never said quite this before."

" I've said it now, anyway."

" Yes. I prefer you when you talk like this, Hugh ; I wish you would more. But, you know, I don't think you're right."

" No ? "

" When you advocate this . . . absolute change, as you call it, you don't stop to pick out anything that *may* be useful or desirable in this present life, I suppose. You don't trouble to do that. No selection permitted apparently. It's all got to be demolished ; you wouldn't be satisfied otherwise."

" All right," he said. " Don't get excited about it."

" No, I won't get excited. I just want to understand, please. *I* can't afford to play at life ; and I'm not suggesting that you can. But I have a family and my first duty is to my family. What about this . . . change ? I suppose, for example, we shouldn't be standing here quietly on a lawn, eh ? There might be no lawns ? "

" I can't say. For a time, perhaps not. Not like this. No

privately heated alligator-tanks, or privately mown stretches of soft grass."

"Don't you *like* this lawn, Hugh? Never mind about the damned alligators . . . but this chance of restfulness and quiet trees?"

"Of course I do. What has that to do with it? Presumably when I was . . . Paul's age, say, I was afraid to sleep alone at night; that's no reason."

"What do you know about Paul at night, Hugh?"

"The barest fragments. I was merely illustrating."

"Then, why bring in Paul?"

"My dear girl, you want to understand. . . . How can you, if you wilfully misconstrue my words? I enjoy slouching about this lawn because I'm accustomed to it; and the feeling for it has grown into my bones. But I know it has to disappear; and I know, too, that it doesn't breed any very delightful traits in us . . . and I'm prepared for it to vanish."

"This is what you advocate—what you are planning?"

"Confused idea. It's not my advocacy, so far as I advocate, that is likely to revolutionize the shape of things; it isn't a matter of advocating a patent medicine."

"You don't seem physically capable," said she, "of avoiding a quibble.

"I am not quibbling."

"Oh, well, you can't expect me to be conversant with all the subtleties of jargon; you're not talking to a politician. I daresay there are several others who . . . what d'you want me to say? . . . have the same object, the same intention; I don't know what your friends are thinking about."

Inertia held them for a moment, the sense of futility. "Well?" he said, sombrely, with lids half-closed. "Well? Do you really think *we*—our types of mind—are worth perpetuating? We can't intermingle for three minutes without becoming irritated children with one another. . . . That is what our class is growing into; we've got cradle-personalities. I sometimes pause and look back on the remarks I have made over ten minutes or so, the contributions I have made to polite and leisurely reflection; they are almost invariably subhuman. We can't piece together ideas, let alone words. Look at us."

She swallowed again, watching. He left it to her; agree-

ably remote he considered it, alone there with her, in the quiet, steadied by the sudden weight of his arguments. Maternal she was getting—style and figure, too—motherhood and the demand for a licence to motherhood was growing imperceptibly on her ; he must take care.

She said, " Have you a cigarette ? " She took it and glanced round at the house as at a lair—like an envoy from it recalling her mission. She fingered the grey silk shawl. " Quite warm for November. Hugh, I don't want to wrangle over this ; you must believe me, I don't. I want to talk seriously because I feel driven on whether I enjoy it or not to talk seriously, and *I*'m not going to shrink from it, but you're. . . . What is it about you ? You're so unfathomable. Not quite human. Speaking to you is like dropping stones into a pond with no bottom to it—just no bottom at all. Stones merely go out the other end into nowhere. Hugh, I'm not going to appeal to you along *one* obvious line ; because I know you haven't got a family in the sense that I have . . . and *want* it, mind you ; I never made any pretence. I like having children. And if you thought of it, I feel your outlook might be different."

He couldn't disregard the fascination of her—in this queer lengthened intimacy—and the words sprang into his mind " Courageous . . . actually courageous thing she's doing ; " but he frowned abruptly. " What difference ? What outlook ? Facts are facts, if one has a score of children."

He was ploughed down ; it was impossible to resist. " But you ought to be thinking," she cried, " if only a little, about the older people who couldn't adapt themselves to some extraordinary change of their lives. How could they ? I'm taking . . . mother." She waited, looking as though she expected a sneer ; nerves were growing tighter, on the rack of this " duty." " Mother walks sometimes on these lawns . . . sits on them in the summer reading. You know. She's contented on them, meditates almost at peace with herself ; she's sweet doing so. One really feels she decorates the lawns and was somehow meant to. It wouldn't *be* mother without these lawns and the house where she potters about in her little way ; it would be a strange bewildered animal . . . might be almost mad. Impossible. I . . . oh, I know you're going to say I'm a kiss-mammy . . . sob-stuff ; you *would*."

" I wasn't. Why should I ? You're right."

" Incomprehensible you are, Hugh. Inconsistent. I feel you're almost intangible. Do be human for once."

" I'm being very human, my dear. I'm not denying anything. On the contrary . . . you're most attractive to me in your explanations. I've never seen you looking so nice and really . . . charmingly grown-up. Apart from mother altogether, you do fit this lawn, the chestnuts ; you're *correct* here, with that loose embroidered belt, for example, and your hair just right. It's like eternity. Are you thinking then of having more kids, Irene ? "

" Hugh, don't joke ; I'm not in the mood ; I warn you . . ."

" No, no. I mean it. You make me think of having children as part of you now—a very alluring part. *You* talked about it first. You seem to appropriate the past generation and the coming one into your arms. I wouldn't want to spoil that picture if it could be helped. But it can't. No good. What do you want me to do ? To cease to take interest in the inevitable ? Only a mental drunkard can do that ; and I've worked the drink out of my system once and for all."

" You've got schemes . . . plans, haven't you ? *I* don't know the phrase. Conspiracies. . . . I suppose you object to that word. Anyway, organizing of some kind with thousands of them. Or hundreds of thousands perhaps. You showed some of it to Maurice and Geoffrey ; I don't know why you did."

" M'm ? Hundreds of thousands ? *Me ?* My dear girl, keep a sense of proportion."

" Oh, I suppose you've found others like yourself ; I don't suggest you're the only one. I . . . I'm going to be honest ; it made me rather sick. And I told mother something of it —stupid, I wish I hadn't. She can't understand ; she thinks you don't know where you're going ; she imagines it's all . . . oh, never mind. No one else is capable of saying a word. I believe they're all so wrapt up in their own illusions that they'd stand and watch the earth melting away under their feet, and I . . . oh, I wouldn't come up and appeal to you for anything if I could help it. You're inhuman ; you're like a queer changeling come into the family without any feelings under your nice talk."

" You always did resent my existence, Irene."

" I didn't. I never resented you. But now you. . . . Hugh,

why are you trying to make me lose my temper ? . . . it's too serious for that."

He stared at her and depression dropped deep into his organs ; he incorporated for a second all the landscape into her ; and she and it balanced together on the edge of vertigo, nothingness. He, too, balanced in sympathy—tightened himself for the knife-blade ; foreboding flapped over. From this moment onwards a desperate impetus, a series of bewildering changes ; the house behind her menaced like a bad taste. " Why are we standing here on the damp ? " he said. " Shall we walk ? Along the terrace and through the copse and back. My dear, I confess I'm really sorry ; though you won't accept my sorrow of course. You seem to imagine . . . what is it ? . . . that *I* with these hands have constructed the whole thing you fear ; and that *I* can demolish it again. You seem to have no conception that the very . . . forces of humanity, the very elemental masses of the Workers, are preparing of themselves to sweep away all the landmarks. Do be reasonable."

" It can't do it. These things can't happen out of nothing. Hugh, they can't. Some one's always got to do it. You're talking mysticism ; you're going mad. You make me shudder."

Her feet chased her phrases ; he caught her sleeve. " Why hurry ? Running won't take you out of it. I *thought* that was the bug that was biting you ; some of you bourgeoisie seem to pay no more attention to the workers than to . . . dung. Less, if anything. Deader, more inert, to you than dung is. Till suddenly they twist and writhe a little, and the fact of their vitality bursts upon you . . . explodes."

" Hugh ! I can't stand you. Don't go on. Things can't happen . . ."

" They can, I say. They do. Why won't you be philosophical ? So much simpler. So *much* simpler. I can understand your feelings about . . . well, Paul alone ; it must be a hard nut and a bitter innards to it. But it's no good imagining that *I*'ve done it on him, that by appealing to *me* you can effect anything. Anything at all. I know—that's all ; I know."

" Oh, you *know* . . . you *know*. Always your knowledge and my abysmal ignorance. You make me give myself away and look ridiculous, and then you grin and pretend to pity. Well, you can do what you like ; *I*'m not going to drift about,

keeping a foot in both camps, thinking of no one's salvation but my own, and perhaps . . . one or two others. I've got responsibilities ; no time to waste."

" Very well. You must take your own course." Relief—and yet the bottomless pit : winding damp pathway of the copse, crossed with broad roots and mossy, that had no longer meaning to him. " But don't say I've no responsibility. I have no children, but that isn't the whole of life."

Dark trunks still slimy from the rain ; there was faint bird twitter ; she hurried again. " No time to waste . . ."

" Why, no time to waste ? What's the matter ? "

" Oh, I don't know ; I don't know "—she rubbed her hands painfully—" I wouldn't tell *you* anyway. If you had a baby you'd understand . . . anyway what it feels like. I wish you wouldn't follow me back ; I wish you wouldn't worry at me ; let me go. Let me *go*."

" Yes, yes. Don't shriek like that. Get on then and I'll . . ."

Ah !—over the edge. It had come ; nothing but rush and hacking agony of blows. No pause, no warning. A child's voice called above them. He had looked up and at once, almost before the first chill had evaporated, was numbed to a dry death-like stump, waiting. In a yew-tree, fifteen feet over their heads, where the branches interlocked, sat Eve and Irene's child ; half visible they seemed to crouch there, and hay had been piled under them to make a nest. He distinguished hands and clothing stained with tree-bark, and that she had tied a long scarf round the child's waist and round her own to drag it up there as she climbed. By the path side was a wheel-barrow, lined with hay—transportation in the first escape. He saw his sister's face, an animal noosed suddenly as it ran, body twitching with the shock. What could *he* do ? Inertia among the yew-trees ; this was for the women to decide.

Sickening rapidity behind which one limped. The mother threw up her arms—" Paul . . . Paul . . . Paul."

The boy dropped back to her bubbles of laughter. " We 'scaped away. . . ." Brutal childhood—cold as bird-song on her powerlessness ; the man saw her eyes, swimming and refusing to overflow ; she seemed dazed—not more dazed if an orang-utan had carried off her child. She ran to the trunk, clutched it, ran back again. " Come down."

" *We* heard you talking along the path." Heard ? How much ?

" Come *down*. Come at once. What are you doing with him . . . dangerous. No, no, darling, it's not dangerous. Stay still. Only you gave me a fright. You startled us. Didn't they, Hugh ? Oh. . . ."

He did not move ; he watched her force back the overflow and shiver like a leaf after it. She managed to lift her head. " What are you doing ? "

" Wild things," cried the tree-woman behind the leaves. " Fierce little wild things. Yes, very fierce. Never tamed yet. Wild cats. I'm his wild cat-mother and he's my kitten."

" Come down, carefully. Come now. When we are here to help you. Paul, will you come to me ? "

" You must *mew* for him to come ; he doesn't understand anything else. Do you ? "

" No-o-o," shouted the child, with the cruelty of children, half divine and aware of it.

" You must mew or purr for him."

And the man, feeling the strain so tight across his chest as he watched, spoke with dry lips, " Eve. Hadn't you better come down ? "

" Why ? "

" Eve, you've got to come down or I'll come up."

" Oh, serious. . . . Not a rough husband ? "

" Eve, my dear ! " but she was beginning to lower herself with the boy clutched to her left side, lost through the flicking branches.

" Step . . . step back. Don't interfere. You put me off."

She paused near down, reaching out a long black leg to the lowest foothold ; she drew it up suddenly and fingered loose the scarf from round her waist. " I'm coming now. Wait . . . wait. No, no . . . no help. Stand clear. Right clear." She poised and leapt, with the child's eyes in a huge excitement, and his hands twisted in her dress, leapt, half-turning in the air and by the immobile barrow ; then dropped him among the hay, and seizing the handles ran like a swinging gate before them and along the path. Wild laughter and the wheel took the tree-stumps with a bound and swayed. Irene was running, and Hugh after her. Desertion he feared ; action was just less horrible. He was thinking—she'll kill her.

" Stop. Stop," cried Irene. " How dare you ? *Stop*, I say." The path twisted ; the barrow was gone grinding, and loose branches caught and spluttered. His sister flung out her arms. " Stop. . . ." He saw her ; he saw it from a thousand miles away—the catch of her shoe in a tree-root, the shriek, the miry fall among the tread of leaves and moss.

He lifted her, and she shook him away. No tears came ; she was tremendous and white marble—a cold maternity above all failings, the dignity that has its young. He felt back in memory, and knew that her shriek had touched the tree-tops ; they *must* have heard. A moment—and Eve appeared alone.

" Irene, what is it ? Are you hurt ? Your frock. . . ." She stared at her. " Irene, what happened ? Oh, and your hands . . ."

" Where is the boy ? " said Irene's lips.

She jerked her head. " In the wheel-barrow."

" Thank you. Do you mind . . . ? " Their eyes attended her. " Don't follow."

Eve was motionless in the narrow path ; she blinked ; she was brushed by the passing mother. At that contact, Irene had turned and with open palm smacked her full across the cheek. " How dare you touch him ? " Fiercely she bit her lip ; and in another moment, utterly suave and null, she had glided round the corner. They heard her low serious voice.

That was strange see-saw of moods, hidden among the yew-tree branches and the ground-ivy. They waited through an interminable silence. Birds twittered feebly. " Why," said he at last, " did you do it, Eve ? Let me hear about it ? "

" I wanted to. Just that. Partly, I was bored with negation, partly a dream."

" Ah." The red sting faded from her cheek ; she touched it with a finger-tip, gazing at distance. Without warning his mind turned a furious somersault. He was surprised at it.

" What ? What ? Is she to strike you ? God Almighty, the bitch to snap out like that. How are you, my dear ? What shall I . . . ? Fah ! I . . ."

" Agh ! Let it be."

" Like all her type ; nauseating, ill-tempered children. Ill-tempered ? Worse than that . . . filthy pampered unreliable bitches ; no one can drop a finger on her pup. When *I* spoke about it, she almost bit my hand off. No more . . . no more.

By God, no; no more. I'm through with them all. You wait."

"Oh, leave them, Hugh; leave them."

"No, I won't. She's thought thoughts about the decent . . . the living millions that drive me mad to remember. The millions that sweat to keep *her* in this overfed explosive condition. I'd tone her down a bit, by heaven. These slouching yawning perverts in drawing-rooms that mumble about the Unemployed and begin to snarl . . . I can't help it. It's disgusting. I've ceased to care about restraint; I've seen too much of the Masses. No longer vague shadows to me, the Masses. I love them. These, let them look out." Silence among the trees; all thin whispers on a damp pathway; he was trembling.

She said, "Have they gone?"—and he walked to the corner.

"Absolutely. Vanished away." The barrow stood with its hay alone. "What about this? We'd better wheel it back, I suppose. Round by the kitchen garden, m'm? Will you come along?" The procession trundled by diverse paths, almost wordless, soberly; no hurry—a laughable great circuit with the barrow of hay; and no one saw them in the half-lights. Meditation went on. He dropped the handles and sat across them, pondering into cabbage-stalks and cabbage-smells; clouds were thickening again. "But you oughtn't to have dragged the kid into it. After all—when I think—you exploited him. It turned into too muddy a business."

"Oh, you're over-sensitive about him," she said; "other babies go through it."

"I know, but . . . it *is* a child. Because other children have suffered, is there any need . . .? Well, not now at any rate. No time to philosophize now. Come on."

They wheeled it to its shed. "And now?" she said.

"Tea, I suppose. We must go in. We're probably late already."

"Irene. . . .?"

"We can't help her. Ten to one she won't say a word; we must face it out. Never mind what . . . a slow funeral for the rest of the evening or a bloody gallop into the abyss. *I* don't care. I'm reckless. Of course, the old man . . . but she won't say anything in front of him. She's found it's useless. And if she does, we can sit and smile quietly."

Tea was half over ; and Irene was not there—having tea in the nursery ; and Mr Brabant had not arrived from no one knew where. Only Mr Margarietson holding the floor, fully possessing the floor now, after twenty-four hours, to a serious Maurice and Miss Franklin ; Mrs Brabant assented with nods and murmurs, and Aunt Mildred was dug into a supercilious corner. Hugh heard the first remarks linked with an indefinable past ; he did not attempt to get away. His face flamed ; he sat. His fingers had to be directed by him to fold the bread.

" . . . . and while I agree with you, Maurice, that we ought in theory to have a stable Government now, my impression is that we shall soon find ourselves up against the problem of dual control ? "

" Dual control ? "

" Yes. We have control now by a set of Trade Union officials. . . . You said, Maurice ? Well, I shouldn't think you'd find many argue such a point nowadays ; I'd incline to say it was self-evident. The majority of these men are totally unconstructive vague-thinking creatures, but that doesn't prevent them wielding power, as things are . . . as things *are*."

He drew breath and was interrupted, " Oh, yes, I do think it's *awful*. Whatever will . . . oh, I beg your pardon."

" Miss Franklin wishes to speak ? "

" Oh, no, no. Please don't break your remarks. It's nothing at all. I . . . h'h, h'h. . . . Oh, *you* know I was going to say that it *is* serious, isn't it. My brother, the one who's the mining-engineer, says we're out for trouble, and I *do* wish I knew what one ought to do about it . . . h'h, h'h."

" Miss Franklin can depend on my devotion."

" Oh . . . h'h, h'h . . . thanks. But, seriously, what would you advise ? Mr Margarietson's never serious, is he, Mrs Brabant ? Is he *ever* to be paid attention to ? I wish I could tell."

" If you're anxious to know, then I daresay determined males like Maurice and myself, and, no doubt, Hugh, will have to form ourselves into a bodyguard to protect our little properties. If these Trade Unionists take advantage of our falling trade . . . and undoubtedly they will do so . . . to make the chaos worse than it already is, why then we shall have apologetically to end this dual control." He hummed awhile. " Eh, Maurice ? What do you think ? "

" Yes. Mmm—rather. I should think it will be . . . er . . . an inevitable step."

Hugh slid his cup on to the piano, and came opposite Mr Margarietson ; between them stood a little round table with heavy top—inlaid in variegated marble—solid. At its centre Mr Margerietson's steaming cup. Suspension. Life was as if caught clean out of the room on a net. Hugh's face settled into deep sagging redness—wild stiff hair. " I'm afraid you can't count on me. I don't believe in those sort of organizations."

" No ? Ah. Well, I thought everybody nowadays . . ."

" And really it's just ignorance of conditions, just sheer ignorance to talk about Trade Union officials in that way. I mean, whatever they are, they're certainly not a set of groping fools who happen to have a little power. That's merely a perversion of facts."

" My dear fellow, I must beg to differ. Er . . . Miss Franklin, may I get you some more tea ? "

" Wait a moment." He was deaf and blind. " What argument can you bring up. You say . . . you say . . ." Tapping furiously on the table-top. " I mean, do you attempt to argue that the working class hasn't a right to form Trade Unions ? "

" Certainly. When circumstances have so developed, that the community as a whole . . ."

" Well, then, you *do* argue that you can deprive these people of the right to combine for advancing and defending their claims. I mean, if you got, say, fifty shillings a week . . ."

" But I don't "—and the nervous burst of laughter drove Hugh mad ; he looked round for a moment like a baffled animal.

" No, you don't. I know you don't. But do you realize that the logical end of your ideas, if you drove them right through, would be . . . slavery ? There's no intermediate course. Absolutely." He felt a presence at his side and resented it, prepared to snap out. It was Eve. She was standing by him, looking down over the table. Curious interest, curious remote childlike interest in her face. " You know what I mean ? Slavery."

" And what about it ? " said Mr Margarietson, calmly. " There are probably, to a student of history, a good many worse conditions than that of slavery. Decent enlightened supervision, that is all it comes to. Careful and scientific

selection ; sensible masters have never, in any period, been anything but sparing of their slaves. Frequently kind. A great number of the lower classes to-day would find themselves . . . well, I might almost say profoundly benefited."

Hugh leaned his hand flat on the marble, swallowing. Light and sound had vanished ; he knew it ; he would have retreated if he could. " No use talking, I can see. But of all the disgusting, uncivilized, reactionary. . . ." Trembling, his voice rose. " You talk about human beings as if they were pigs and poultry. Men I know, men I'm personally acquainted . . ."

There was earthquake, a mad crash. The heavy table slipped under his hand. How ? How ? A quick cup and a cry. He saw Mr Margarietson's face white as dough and agonized. " My foot ! My foot ! " They were rising ; and through the door came Mr Brabant, and sucking his pipe, gazed feebly from shape to shape.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

No more in the open—too much had been said already. One must have silence now. This loose congeries of men and women drew hide coverings about itself. Talk went on in the darkness. Quietly a co-ordination was formed here, an understanding effected there. The night passed politely away.

In the morning rain fell. The electric lights were on. Hugh, with his suit-case, found under the porch a brooding shape—his father, a pipe-bowl that glowed and retired. Breakfast had been for a few only ; the rest had no need for early trains. They stood there face to face, and the raw draught came through. Hugh was surprised. " Not driving to the station with us, are you ? "

" No. No."

" Oh ? You've got your hat and coat on."

" It's my old waterproof. See the rents. No, I'm going round to the stables, as a matter of fact ; they're finishing off my cat-bear cage this morning. Just . . . see you off."

" Yes. How's old . . . m'm . . . old Margarietson to-day ? Have you seen him yet ? "

" Your mother saw him. The foot's a little easier."

" I suppose he'll be here a week or more."

Mr Brabant, after a silence, replied, " Several days at any rate. Yes. This . . . periostitis is a nasty thing. A damn great table smack across the foot like that. No, no." He shook it away with his head. " Nasty . . . ff ! "

" I'm infernally sorry about it. Even now I . . . can't understand how it happened. I can't *see* how I did it. I don't want to lessen my guilt, but honestly I believe he somehow jerked it himself."

" H'h. H'yes, probably he did, very probably. But y'know . . . er . . . Hugh, it was a mistake to argue with old M., even as a pastime. It's no good trying to argue with these ancient crows. They've got their fixed ideas, and I should imagine that, if you're feeling a bit blue, they'd drive you purple in five minutes. *I* know. But . . . Lord ! I *told* you so," said Mr Brabant, peevishly. " Why do it ? "

Hugh gazed, gnawing on his lip in the half-light. His father struck a match, broke it, and tossed the fragments away. " I mean," said he in humble tones, " it's your affair, of course. Don't think I'm trying to dictate to you. No. But these people are different to you and me ; it's better to be quiet. What is it ? Someone coming ? "

" No. I just glanced into the hall."

" Quite, quite." There was a pause. Mr Brabant raised his head and sighed ; he peered with difficulty at his watch. " Well, it's quarter past. The car ought to be round in a moment ; can you hear it ? Eh ? I'll just see . . ."

" You'll apologize to old Margarietson for me."

" M'm ? Oh, yes, yes."

" You'll be looking in on him this morning ? "

" Oh, I expect so," said Mr Brabant, quickly. " Sometime . . . sometime . . . where is that man ? Hugh."

" Yes ? "

Mr Brabant swayed a while in silence ; then he burst out like a bubble. " That money affair—that scheme of letting you have a few thousand more to invest. Eh ? Haven't we spoken about it again ? Eh ? "

" No, I didn't. I must apologize ; I was thinking . . ."

" Yes, yes ? What ? "

" I was still thinking it over. There are difficulties."

" What difficulties ? "

" Of expanding suddenly at this moment ; but I should have written . . . certainly I should. I've no adequate excuse."

" You *didn't* write," said Mr Brabant, and his voice quavered up and he stepped to the door. " I don't understand. Oh, you do vex me sometimes. Why can't we deal on quiet and business-like lines ? You upset everything. It's incredible, incredible. . . ." Then he shrank again ; in courteous tones he said, " But I'll talk to old M. about you."

" About me ? "

" About your investments. He's often got a good tip."

" Yes."

Had the old man spoken fiercely ? One could believe not ; he could have believed not himself, and he looked meekly across the gravel. Rain pattered on ; below chestnut trees the lawn lay soaking, and the alligator pool, blown by gusts.

They were in the train. Hugh lifted himself at last from a heavy stillness and glanced at his wife. " Here we are then, rushing out of it. That house—what a bottle of nods and whisperings it must be now ; it smelt of them."

" D'you care ? "

" Not much," said he. " Not very much. I feel sodden with sleep. How dismal this rain is, like a twilight of the old gods. H'm." He yawned and stretched his legs.

" Did you see Irene this morning ? " she asked him.

" No."

" Shall we see 'em when we're back ? "

" Back ? Who knows ? I don't. I only know they're talking about us. She's talking now, while she curls her hair or what not ; I can almost hear her." He stared at the hedges. " Sweetheart, I don't blame you for that yew-tree incident yesterday ; you must realize that. But you must also realize," said he, heaving his body, " that Irene used to endure you . . . almost to like you, if only she could, by excusing you, put all the guilt on me. M'm ? You see ? My dear, you're so crude and rustic in your methods. H'h. It startles even me."

" *And* you like it."

" Well, I . . ."

" Yes, you do," she said, " and you'd confess that you're halfway there yourself, if you had the guts. Your own hands

take charge of you. What about tipping over the table on old . . ."

" Don't. It makes me feel rather sick. I can't understand it. He must have somehow pulled."

" Go on. You don't know your own strength or—what's worse—your own desires. You're as crude as I am."

" Do you think so ? " he said lazily. " Maybe you're right. Probably most of us intellectuals are a bit anarchistic . . . rural. I suppose I *have* a way of putting my head down and driving like a bull. H'h."

" Don't get conceited, dear. I tipped the table over myself."

" You ? "

" Why not ? I heard the door open and supposed I'd better make a diversion. Quite easy . . . one toe forward—up she goes. "

" Eve, my dear . . ."

Wet days followed like the blinking of a surly face. No doubt talk went on. This congeries of men and women could not fly apart, even in crisis. It drew closer together, thrusting out words like tentacles. *He* knew they must be talking—at 'bus-stops and in corridors, a chance five minutes on a sofa, open street-doors, a bar-lounge. That is the way the world goes ; that is the way one crisis grows pregnant with the next. The screw of his own soul tightened in sympathy from day to day. He said little of it ; he thought at nights.

In their top-flat they lay in chairs reading night after night. They were getting on well. They did not probe one another . . . accepted merely. Books were read. Through the crack of opened window, night moaned, piped, rumbled up to them out of pits of space. Little noises among rain—the wail of barges on the river. They were a hermitage for evenings. They felt the talk everywhere, because they knew it had to be. It was ooze of life, squelching below the surface.

Their book-leaves turned, the flutter of reeds above silence. She sighed. " Hugh, are you still hurt with me ? "

" 'M ? " He looked solemnly. " No, my dear, I'm quite sure. No, sweetheart."

" No ? Don't forget it—the way I carried off that child Paul. You felt outraged for him. A moment or two ; but you said no more."

" What's reminded you ? " He brooded awhile ; he put down his book and rising on the hearthrug stretched out his

arms. " Yes. Am I wrong, I wonder. What was the sensation it gave me ? "

" You've said before once . . . several times . . ."

" I know I have. Well, it's a sensation that the child should be sacred. Not dragged into our rough-and-tumbles. You pushed the war too far . . . too deep. I admire it. Oh, don't think I can help myself admiring it from my distance."

" Strange, Hugh. I'm not really listening to you, though I heard. I was remembering. There were moments in that yew-tree . . . we were up there twenty minutes . . . when I thought coldly and dreamily, if he should fall. Or if I should drop him over."

" Yes. Yes. I say so," he answered. " You push the war into the very depths."

" Ah, my dear, no. You don't understand. Is it that I'm so unlike every one else ? I know that people in books often seem mad to me ; so I suppose I'd seem mad to them. But . . . when I ran away with that child, I didn't think so much of annoying 'em all—though that came in—but I wanted to enjoy myself among the trees."

" Yes, with *it*," said he, " with the child."

" What ? What did you say ? With *it* . . . well, why not ? See, I think I hoped they'd miss him ; yes, I hoped they'd miss him and get fluttered, but it wasn't very important. He clung to me while we were climbing ; it was like burrs clinging —a piece of spider's web. It would have been like peeling off burrs and shaking them out of one's fingers, if I'd somehow dropped him ; and when I heard you coming, I wanted to put my hand over his mouth. . . . These sensations were queer ones."

" Yes," said he.

" Why does it make you sigh ? "

" I ? One is restless, that's all. You know, if you had a child, you would feel the same about it. I think you would."

" Oh, yes. *Oh*, yes. See, you don't surprise me. I know other people feel differently ; but then I am the natural one —not they. It seems a warm and honest thing of me to admit that, if I had a child, I should sometimes want to crack its skull . . . just as I cracked that pot the other afternoon. Down here. That frightens you."

" No."

" It doesn't agree with your idea of treating a child . . .

of thinking about it, say ; though I'd rather, looking on myself as a child, be treated in that way, I would truthfully, and I wish to God I had been—and had the sense of at least some human emotions at work round me, and that I had been begotten with a certain amount of self-abandon, and not like tacking cheap bedroom furniture together ; but that's not *your* idea, is it ? And a child ought never to know grown-ups are anything but a set of pink and white waxworks, with fingers of regulation coolness and smoothness all day and night, and polite musical laughs ; that's your idea."

He moved his shoulders and stared into the light. " Is it ? Perhaps it is ; and then perhaps we're both of us wrong. You think of children as a physical pleasure to yourself . . ."

" Why shouldn't I ? "

" M'm ? I . . . can't say you shouldn't."

" What then ? "

He stood, frowning painfully. " Oh, I can't explain. Children are unnatural things to us ; that's the trouble. We think too much about them. Even you get obsessed with the idea of them ; though not as I do. I must understand more ; there's everything still to learn."

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Nine days passed—ten days—and here was depression like a blanket. It drove him again into the night streets. He grew restless with it ; one struggled with these other maggots—these Irenes and Margarietsons—but inside an everlasting nutshell. This shell, when he dared look at it, was the body of all his depression ; it was the present image of his father. No argument or self-abuse could shift it. It had the substance of thick air ; and while he lay groaning under it, he saw weariness and pain slowly resettle upon Eve. There were tears one midnight and another silence ; *she* could not help him.

Here is repetition. All life is repetition, thought he, drifting for the how many hundredth time towards his morning 'bus. It seemed there was no remedy ; she would be thus for ever. The depression had begun to swallow all his world, even thought of her ; he'd not yet written to his father—days went

by and he postponed it, weighed, temporized. He was hungry for the streets as an oblivion.

It was night. He walked the pavements and in the wet streets torn newspaper lay like skins. A spawn of children flowed round his feet, at times a throng, at times disappearing, sucked away through doors. No order, no consequence in these rhythms. Their cries ran up the house-sides, and they beat on tins or sitting under porches stamped their boots and sang. He saw in them the mass that has no generations, but pours undivided in one stream towards its ocean. We—we, he thought, have our discreet generations ; not they. Where do their babies become children, and their children adults ? Nowhere that I can guess. The mass will attain *as* a mass ; and each of these two-legged little creatures already knows an infinity I can never know ; their eyes look like it. And he glanced from window to window at the impenetrable lives—lighted windows where the washing still sometimes hung across the ceiling and empty flower-pots stood on window-sills. So many others have to suffer. The jostled rooms, often more full of beds than of air—one bed close packed with bodies ; rooms that are not a shelter, but a place where sleep can pass, and to which there is no alternating chamber, but the dark streets. Sleep ? If humanity needed no sleep, the poor would not be given dwelling-space. He walked on ; he glanced again, timidly. Rooms where children may see death stretched out and ended almost before they know of such a thing as life ; eyes that see the travail of their own birth repeated year after year on groaning beds and mothers passing through a dozen deaths in life—men and women writhing together through the death of cohabitation. Death and life one thing from a child's first breath—pain and happiness one thing—self and others one thing. The perfect synthesis of opposites. Fish unendingly saturated in a single fluid that flows on, linking, translucent, permeable—always flows on.

He fished ; old faces rose to meet him out of night and recognition was coming quick to the surface of their eyes ; a bar-tender in this or that pub, some casually drinking man with whom he had spoken. On one evening the vendor of medicines, on another the adenoidal boy out on his shining soaked door-step ; drops fringed the railings ; air thinned in the street after downpour. " But what about a stroll ? " said Hugh. " Would you ? It's not raining now."

" H'm."

" If you're busy, of course . . . I mean, you've finished your meal ? "

" Yes ? "

" Well, it's as you care. A short stroll. See ? Round a few streets and back, eh ? Have a drink ? "

" I was going out in about a half hour. You mean . . . come now ? Yes ? Good, if you want to. No, *I* have no objections ; let us say the pleasure is mine. Yes ? "

They swaggered down the street ; words had grown glutinous suddenly, slow in the very rarefied atmosphere ; moisture was there but shrinking away, and the world like a soap-bubble. " Are you unemployed ? " said Hugh. " You're unemployed just now ? "

" Yes." He cleared his throat. " I'm out. Got sacked a month . . ."

" What ? "

" A month ago. About that."

" No hopes ? "

" Agh, no. Think there are any hopes still in this blasted hole ? Fed up with looking."

" God ! what depression it can create ; I've imagined it often enough."

" All have a kick at you when you're out. You're anybody's victim."

" Victim ? " said Hugh.

" Why d'you ask ? Think it sounds a bourgeois thing to say ? Yes ? "

" No, no. Don't say that. If anyone were bourgeois down to the very interior of his guts, look at me. Victim ? Why not victim ? I didn't catch the word."

" Oooh."

Ragged pauses, like this one, would come. Our age of the conflict breeds haunted children, looking for hurt and finding it.

" A miserable life this," said Hugh. " Sloth of the time of waiting for Capitalism to wear itself out—it drags like a slug."

" Not so slow perhaps. H'm—hurrr. . . . You don't feel sometimes it may be quick on us, like some one yelling ? Yes ? People are getting fed up and yet they haven't lost spirit ; the spirit's growing up again, see . . . and it's that kind of fretting irritation . . . petty little unfair annoyance

that makes revolt. You see? These kids they put on the Exchange and give position to—they'd look through you as if you didn't exist, and say 'keep in line, if you please, keep in line. . . .' Oh, hell, I can't express; I don't know."

"*I* couldn't restrain myself," said Hugh. "How do you all do it? *I* couldn't hold myself from something . . . what? Arson, maybe. One feels like setting fire. How is it no one crawls into Westminster Abbey and sets alight somewhere? How is it no one does? Not one of all the millions? It's not human to carry on."

"You don't understand. See, they'd only say 'showing off . . . bit above himself that fellow.' That's all they'd say, our sort of people. What good'ld *that* do? They've got no sympathy with showing off; they'd say 'serve him right; why weren't he brought up proper.' You've to wait till they all want to do it together. Got to wait. It's the only way."

"But don't *you* feel . . .? M'm . . .? I mean you, yourself, doesn't it make your fingers work with fury and your toes itch?"

"Agh, Christ," cried the boy. "Cut it out. 'Tisn't funny. Wait till you know what it is to feel yourself coming over all blind. Maddening. Damn swines bloody swag-bellied . . . insulting, insul'. . . ." Rain began to fall around them, between them; footsteps came down flat and wet, monotonous.

"You said you had something else?" said Hugh. "Did you say so?"

"Aha, that's so. I'd . . . h'm . . . meet 'em somewhere round and go on p'raps."

"Them?"

"Oh, don't you know? No. No. Some of the boys. A meeting of the District Council. Y'know it? Yes?"

"How could I?" said Hugh. "District? You must take me with the little I know—profoundly little, almost a negative amount. District? Yes, yes, there is a picture, but of labyrinths, spiders' webs; it is an agony of involved systems into which I haven't dared to stretch out. Not yet. You must forgive me."

"Nothing to be afraid of," said the boy.

"No, no; but you're meeting some of them?"

"Just up here."

" Ought I to come on farther ? "

" Why not ? "

" Will they understand ? "

" Why not ? "

" Yes, but I haven't even grasped ; you didn't explain who. . . . You'll make it clear ? "

" Why not ? "

Mind hung back but his body had already moved on ; he was among them now, the voices and the rough hands and steaming coats. He had said, " You have time ? A moment or two ? Yes, for one with me ? " He was seated in the bar with five others round the small circular marble-top. The bar sang and chimed, and he dribbled into his pocket the copper change wet from spills along the counter ; his hands wet from the overflow of five glasses. A voice spoke incessantly to him, leaning close to him ; he tried to wrap himself in it.

Earlier he had seized the boy's arm. " What ? What, eh ? Unemployed . . . oh, unemployed. Oh." He was afraid to be curious because his curiosity grew suddenly so intense. Organizing fingers at work in the mass, that was to him only mass—threading and cross-threading, turning mass into direction, into purpose, into conscious eyes. This was something greater even than mass, more terrible. He brooded slowly from face to face ; the narrative sang on at his ear and he nodded—" Is that so ? Yes ? So ? " From face to face, each face a heavy drop in the tide. He was aware that his eye was upon the revealing microscope ; the clot—the clot, inchoate and crusted and yet, so it disclosed itself, knit together by interweaving fibres dreadful and sure as a spider's web, fashioned under darkness and below the power of vision. He felt the force that brings thousands into streets ; it was beyond him.

The voice continued, like a bird's—on and on almost toothless and sibilant ; he turned solemnly to it. He nodded sleepily. " Yes ? Oh, yes ? So ? " " And when he heard that, he got the sick proper and he told'm straight out he wasn't going to no settlement, and if he couldn't get nothing out of the R.O. . . . see . . . he'd have a brick through window. Got past caring, said he'd just as soon be in quod as outside ; but he was a fool, he was, because it doesn't give any time, that, for the organization to take any action. See ? We should

have come in a body and told'm that if they sent him along, then eighty of us'd want tickets served out for the settlement. Only he gets acting on his own, just what they hope he'll do . . . see . . . what in my belief they was trying to egg him on to. Well, then that evening he *did* have a brick through window, right through he chucked it, stood half-way across the street; mind you I'm not blaming him. . . ." Faces tightening slowly or slowly blotching under strain, eyes that looked at him thoughtfully. One by one. There was the boy, blinking and expressionless—pulp hiding always its inner fermentation. By five minutes he would have lost them. Beer smelt and tasted and all lips were wet. "We come straight out of the Guardians and got our platform ready . . . see . . . round the corner, and when they was coming out, the police thought we'd gone along home, wasn't ready for us; then we ran it out and formed a crowd round it and our secretary got up and told each of'm straight, each of the Guardians, that if they wouldn't consent to receive a deputation. . . ."

Between whiles he was in his flat, lifted high, the steady light out of which all moisture seemed to have been drained; the yellow cat, that hated to wet paws, lay curled a dry fluff. Sometimes, it was at midnight, sometimes through the evenings. Depression returned upon him—the memory of problems unresolved—ghost of his father. With effort he would break through the husk of it and compel dry speech. "Eve. We must force life along, my dear. It's beginning to slow again. But then . . . what? Speak a little. One hopes too much that days and nights are something eventful in themselves."

"Ah. Ah. I think every one always *has* suffered from that sickness p'raps. What can I do? Isn't there anything, in the mass of affairs you touch, that comes up like a needle-point?"

"You know there isn't," said he. "I tell you—I try to tell you—it is one event, all one vast indissoluble event like an ocean in flood-tide; that's an event. That's how I see it. What d'you want?"

"Terrifying. Does this really content you? To live quietly on the back of an event—a kind of sea-gull settling down, and you never seem to worry much now. I envy you. But don't you see, you've left me outside, Hugh, outside? I'm getting frightened. Isn't there some crack . . . don't you imagine

some crack or opening to let me through ? I can't fold wings and settle in like you."

" Like me ? A strange conception of me. My God ! I seem to be more blown about than. . . . H'h." He stretched his body painfully.

" P'raps you don't understand what suffering is," she said. " I can't sink down into the dip of a wave—or whatever you seem to do. Lucky you are. I must have a needle-point to fling myself on to. Something obvious, extraordinary, where there is happening in a fraction of time. Crash, like that."

" Since the week-end . . .," said he.

" The week-end. Yes. That was what I mean. I felt I touched life there. I touched it, even though it was painful ; if it had lasted, I might have been absorbed. But it couldn't last ; I couldn't have stayed longer down there. . . . When one acts, it creates a situation, and there was a situation down there that swung me off into space again like a revolving floor does. But I was driven to do it ; that's the pity."

" What can I do ? What can I give you ? "

" I tell you I feel stretched tight like a bladder. The same things repeat themselves again and again. . . ."

" Yes," he said, without sense of futurity. " Yes. They do. We must struggle on." So it was with them.

The under-water world of streets began to take form ; men began to have significance here and there, even a woman or two, and children. He floated among them. They themselves, he knew, didn't imagine whence or why ; only somehow certain doors could be knocked at, certain bars might be a haunt. He gave out sweets shyly. They told him little and he asked no more. He felt that questions were a challenge, and that they only allowed him because he never put them—like a ghost. It was queer. Perhaps laughter followed him—or pity for the tubercular, the thing that loomed and wasted. Through all this, Eve was felt only as a problem nibbling at his brain, a minute brain-worm. He could solve nothing for her ; he wanted to be free.

There was a by-street where he slowly paced, finding it naked—he swung in meditation from sole to sole, and whistled to himself. It was early yet ; rain had fallen and more gathered slowly. One man came out and hurried. Why ? Why were there streets with no children playing ? Often it happened ? Beyond houses he could hear them ; one street in many is a

playground, the rest swept clean of them. Why ? Perhaps one night there had been a death and the habit grew. He looked up from window to window, faintly lighted. He paused at doorways. Loneliness was a great thing at whiles. He paused again. " Might I ask if you're wanting anyone from this here house ? "

" Eh ? No, no," said he. " I wasn't noticing."

" You'll pardon me making the enquiry of you ; you might have b'n somebody in whom I happen to have an int'rest." He heaved forward out of the doorway to look—a pair of large round glasses, the inextinguishable old stench of pipes ; he filled one now. His voice was husky, dragged out of depths of a wallowing thrusting corpulence that trusted itself everywhere . . grown aged, and grey-moustached ; an accent through it all from across the Atlantic. The pipe-ending of life.

" Be easy about *me*," said Hugh. " I was early, lounging to make up time."

" Ah. I shouldn't have spok'n if there'd been enough light to figure on you at first. That's how 'tis. Y' haven't the cut of one of these land-sharks. . . ." He brooded up the empty street, and down it, quietly.

" Me ? I know nothing."

" Any way in which I might have struck you before ? Ye'll pard'n me ask'n, but your face is familiar. Are you organized in this locality ? "

" Organized ? " said Hugh.

" Maybe you ain't. . . . Seen you in some demonstration, I fancied. Understand me ? Industrially, I mean, or in the political reflex of the Movement. See ? "

" Oh. In the Movement ? No, not organized."

" Sympathetically inclined ? "

" Yes."

" Ah. Well now, y'see, I don't go out for to forget faces. Y'know why ? Eh ? . . ." Life went on ; husky depths came up and a thick hard forefinger steadied Hugh—established points. " D'y'see ? Huh ? " Old burned-out tobacco, caught among clothing, fanned him and eructated in breath. The dead house-door smelt of peeling wall-paper and faint onions ; it was black and silent ; above them rain gathered. " Get me ? I saw them scabs laid out like this . . . see ? . . . see how my fingers are lying across one another ? Stiff every one of'm. Laid out there. Yes. I'm tell'n you, brother."

Hugh shook himself free ; at the third attempt he got his question—" What's this ? This house here, what is it ? Anything strange ? "

" I'll tell you, and my time's almost up. The top family's got notice to quit ; it's a case of eviction "—and he rumbled into the details.

Eviction ? The world tightened. " And three children or four, is it ? God ! "

" I'll be com'n off now." A heavy drop fell between them.

" Raining," said Hugh. " I knew it."

" Ah. But I shan't give it this time ; my tea's wait'n me."

Like a corpse the house was to be left ; and like corpses the top floor family making no sign.

" It's coming down," said Hugh.

" Ah. You're right."

" A moment. When . . . ? " When was it he said ? His lips burst forward through the wind. " Oh, you might be here to-morrow evening, if I came."

" Sure. Them skunks won't have the ejectment order forward yet. Me or one o' the boys it'll be ; maybe more'n one. You come, brother."

And between first and second downpour, remembering what night of the week it was, he walked through the air coming up cold from puddles—a journey of streets he had not believed so long ; his heart ached after it, wetness ran clinging up his ankles. He shivered and found, among the drip-dripping of new storm-clouds, the seller of newspapers by his gate ; he looked up, hugging his parcel under bicycle-cape. " Eh ? No, no. It's coming on again. Can't sell in this. Fellows wouldn't stop, wouldn't take hands out of pockets. . . . I may get them at a later shift." A spatter caught him ; the wind sprang up. " Come on. . . ."

They were together side by side under a narrow archway, backed to impenetrable iron doors ; the rain swooped sheer —a wall flung up a foot from the pavement, numbing like a knife. A hand thrust out for a moment was cleft wet from its arm ; knees stood in a fountain. The gutters began to sing one note wearying—wearying—wearying. These things become eternal before a minute goes. A drowned man plunged past without a look ; drowned men are alone—they are sightless.

" Even in this rain there has to be work," said Hugh.

" M'm."

" Under the Flood slaves still ground on—eh ? "

" M'm."

They were on the edge of seas. Those out beyond swam in them, because they had to swim. A wheel turned driving them on—and the wheel is stronger than a downpour of seas. The couple brooded wet, tossed up here awhile.

One must speak. " What an agonizing night," said Hugh. " Muddiness . . . this doesn't wash it away but rather accumulates it around one—like falling into a shell-hole. Lord ! I feel depressed ; I have a kind of foreboding. Do you think we're in for a cold ? "

" I don't have time for colds."

" But suppose you caught one ? "

" Don't know. I'd have to work it off somehow . . ."

" Earlier this evening . . .," began Hugh again.

" Eh ? "

" Earlier this evening I fell on a case of a threatened eviction—a cripple and wife with several children. Yes. They were on guard—the local Comrades were on guard, ready to bring out the neighbours. These things are common ? They happen here and there ? "

" Yes. Pretty frequently."

Hugh sighed. " I can't keep my thoughts off it ; I itch even now to know what will be their fate."

" H'm."

" One grows sick," said Hugh, after a while, " of being pinned in here by the downpour ; it's tedious."

" Is it ? "

" What ? Don't you feel so ? "

" Oh, well," said the newspaper-seller. " If it's never worse than this, I'm not worrying. You can't alter the course of elemental events. What happens, happens. I said, when I started out to-night—' Bet you, I said, I'll have to stand half an hour in a doorway ' . . . h'h. Since I knew it was coming, what's the odds."

" But *Time* . . . the waste of time."

" What's time ? I read somewhere the Earth has several millions of years more to go. I didn't take the trouble to remember how many millions ; I says—' Let's say a million to go on with.' Good enough. Now we can get down to it.

History's the thing . . . see ? Time is only a part of History. What do seconds and minutes matter ? "

" You are a fatalist . . ."

" H'm," said the paper-seller, looking at his boots.

" It's a valuable thing to be a fatalist ; I wish I were. It solves so many problems."

" Fate ? " cried the other. " What's this about Fate ? When you say Fate, you mean God Almighty—but you're ashamed to confess it. There is no Fate nor God—but only the working out of natural forces, of elemental events. Why hurry them ? Why slacken them ? If my energy is part of a natural force, the energy of my Class, then I move in it . . . easily and gladly."

" You are critical," said Hugh, sullenly, " dogmatic . . ."

" Would you come here unless you wanted to learn ? Have you something to teach me ? Maybe—but I haven't the time to learn it ; and maybe, too, before I'm under the earth, it won't any longer be worth learning. History will have passed it by."

Hugh lifted his head. " True, of course—quite true ; but to me it seems we struggle on beneath a Fate, or at least beneath movements quite out of my control, that carry me towards one or another overwhelming crisis. I love my wife, I'm very fond of my family—and yet some destiny seems to mould us, so that by to-morrow or the next day choice may be final, decisions may be irrevocable. Who knows what death, what painful scenes . . . ? " He sighed. " Did I tell you I had a wife ? "

" H'h . . . no."

" I told you I have a father. Yes. My father is a strange old man ; his influence on me is inexplicable ; it's like the influence of a spirit ; his thoughts are so hidden—even to himself—that they tantalize me. I feel he suspects me ; I feel that at times he shrinks from my presence, that at times he loathes it. We seem fated to stand in horrible suspense, each waiting for the other to speak—and yet we cannot evade one another ; we are drawn again and again into a haunted circle of intimacy and strange misgiving. Is *this* History ? Or is it Fate ? "

" Why . . . er . . . do you tell me all this ? "

" Oh ! I really don't know." He frowned. " Shall we go ? The rain is almost over."

" See, I can't help you much," said the newspaper-seller.

" Were my thoughts—my experiences—so very unusual ? "

" Well . . . it seems a bit queer to me. H'h, h'h. See, I don't know your father *or* your wife. Eh ? I don't say it's queer to you, mind ; maybe it isn't so. But it seems queer to me ; that's what I mean."

" Yes, I understand you. It's late anyway. Suppose we go."

Out of it all, in a bedroom dry as a cave, sat the two old men ; Mr Margarietson was dressed negligently with feet propped on cushions. Green thick curtains lay over the washed night ; rain like spray smashed against the closed and unseen window-panes. Pipe-smoke paused and slumbered in steady air. They baked lazily together on a slow fire of each other's conversation. Mr Margarietson yawned, brooded on the bed.

Mr Brabant—two minutes of inhalation since the last comment—raised big eyes above his pipe and looked at one ceiling-corner ; he let his eyes travel along the green frieze to the next, sitting in his grey silk jacket with slippered feet wide apart. He thought of speaking. He took out his pipe and jerked his chin with a smile. " Queer thing, this building up a family for oneself, M. Look back on it ; I can remember when we neither of us had one. It's really more like sticking a bunch of leeches on oneself than anything else, when all's said and done. Not blood-suckers, I mean. Eh ? I thought you looked startled."

" Not at all. Please go on, Brabant."

" It's this way a family cleaves to a fellow. Don't you find it ? You know, M., I'm a strange cuss ; I know quite well that at the time I entered holy matrimony I had an undissected, but perfectly solid, notion that one was bound to come out the other end of it one day. Now, that I'm plunk right in it, I don't mind it. Find it quite agreeable in fact. But these dreamy kind of notions hang on. . . ."

Mr Margarietson answered, " I remember once, years ago, telling you that you are what our cousins call, with courteous restraint, *un original ;* well, . . . I sometimes regret it ; you adopted it as a species name, and attached it to your particular cage in our human Zoo." He watched Mr Brabant, laughing. " H'm, h'm. Well, what about this family ? By all means let

us talk about families. Where is this mysterious leech-like quality ? "

Mr Brabant said, " No, no. Eh ? You can't put it into words like that. A family doesn't sit cool on a fellow ; it gets hot and tingles, fights and scraps and kicks and keeps pestering itself why A does this, and B said t'other, and who told who what, and . . . h'h ! I feel like a terrier bitch looking for fleas. I wish I could get 'em to do it somewhere else, not round me."

Mr Margarietson, polishing his pipe-bowl, said, " Ye-es. I sympathize. Who, might I ask, is the prime mover in these domestic struggles ? My foot irritates deucedly, but, in spite of that, I'll hazard a guess it's *not* friend Hugh."

Mr Brabant said, " Lord, you're quite right, M., you know. It *isn't* Hugh that starts the old game going. You're absolutely right. Of course, that affair the other night . . . well, we know, between ourselves, damn silly ; I mean . . . not talking here about inexcusable tomfoolery of that kind. You know what I mean. But Hu-u-ugh . . . the point is that he and I understand one another. Now, he comes out with remarks on the War, say, or the big-wigs, or religion, that most people take as provocative ; but, bless you, *I* know what he's driving at. It's quite simple. Not phrases I mean ; phrases are just a matter of the difference between one generation and the next. He's got a mind like mine ; and he'll be just like me when he's my age. Just."

Mr Margarietson, after a silence, looked towards the sound of rain, and said, " You don't see much of him, do you ? "

" No, I don't see him much. A young fellow has his own interests—business arrangements, domestic, and so on."

" H'm. I wonder you don't get into touch with him more. Go up and trot round with him a bit ; you could easily do it."

Mr Brabant crossed his legs and shifted his whole posture. " Oh, I don't know. Life's different to what it was even ten years ago ; fresh lunch-houses I don't hear of ; plays and music-halls and all that bore me to weeping. I can't do the host. . . ." He began to stare at Mr Margarietson.

" Yes, you're quite right. You are a queer cuss. You don't mind me laughing. . . . Here's friend Hugh ; you don't want to see him in Town, and you're trying to invent a way of keeping him from coming down here. Really, I . . ."

" What d'you mean ? "

" Why, yesterday—wasn't it—you were asking me to help him about some investments, and you said yourself that with a hundred or so more a year the boy could enjoy his holidays better—take them farther afield, you said, on the Continent. Well, what can that mean except that you're buying him off his visits here ? "

" Eh ? Bally rot. Buy him off ? You're all bottom-upwards, M. What the devil should I want to buy *him* off for ? " He rubbed at a knee.

" H'h, h'h. Well, I . . . h'h. . . . I can't venture to give you reasons ; but I've known you longer than anyone else in this house, my dear chap, and I tell you you're achieving the acme of your career as *un original*. I do know your mind by this time. You have Hugh . . . according to you a temperament the double of yours. For all purposes *yourself ;* the ideal situation a man could hope for in the family line, the creation of a son who's a complete spiritual mirror. And then you contrive every device to escape his company ; to put it bluntly, you want to skin him off your family circle altogether."

" Bally rot."

" Is it ? Why, two or three days back—when your wife was up here with us—you said, dreamily, ' When Hugh gets a little more cash, he'll build up his own family like the rest of them and make that his centre.' I remember your words. H'h, I . . . really I must laugh."

Mr Brabant jerked his body into a new posture, said nothing and then shrugged. Mr Margarietson watched. " My dear chap, I have profound sympathy. You can never tell, even with these sons that so completely inherit our temperaments ; they have a regrettable way of getting out into the hottest beds of this hot-bed of a world and picking up something."

" M'm ? M'm ? How d'you mean ? "

Mr Margarietson began to nod and said, " Don't jump at conclusions ; I didn't mean the pox. *I* know nothing of Hugh's private life . . . well—h'h, h'h—no more than you do. I merely generalized that . . . er . . . the nearer a son may appear to be the comfortable reflection of oneself, the closer, in fact, he draws to one, the more unpleasant may be the awaiting shock. A man shouldn't wait to have his disillusions at our years of life. I should say that a son remains

far more like oneself the farther away he is ; far more like." Tobacco smoke went up. " I've only got girls ; but if I had a son, I'd have consideration for my drying vitality, and save myself the shock of knowing suddenly that one begets not oneself but a stranger . . . possibly an aggrieved conspirator." He yawned. " Such things happen."

" I don't see what you're driving at," said Mr Brabant, coughed heavily and knocked out his pipe—and Mr Margarietson, when alone, ungarbed himself delicately with sombre features, pondering the coarseness of cold rain—and Mr Brabant, for the first time in many years, came stark awake in the small hours and looked with dry eyes at the darkness. Rain had ceased, life went by in tiny watch-seconds ; his wife slept, and the room was stretched twenty miles, to a lightless vacuum ; his mind filled it and was as empty, stiff and empty. Had he been dreaming ?

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Hugh went home. His mind proliferated idly about the thought of fathers and of wives—what had this proletariat to do with *them ?* And what impulse had made him so intrude them ? And how wise was the bare-headed paper-seller. Yes. He didn't worry much. There were fathers and there were wives. It might be that this disharmony of Eve could never find resolution ; if not, it must be endured ; until his fatigued ear bore it without too sharp a misery. He felt that he was helpless to change her—no clue, no key, hands that fumbled ; thus it was.

He knew, directly he came in, that she was not a half-formulated riddle in his brain's corner but universal—a disease of the whole atmosphere. She seemed scarcely able to move eyes round to him ; she had fallen back into the chair, not huddled but shrunken. The room was sluggish with heat ; windows all closed, and the gas-fire too high for hours. His mind flattened down instantaneously to working in a world beyond time ; thought hung motionless and a sweat gathered slowly as pore after pore burst open gasping. He took a seat. " You aren't well, my dear ? " He watched her ; was she trying to

speak ? His eyelids hurt suddenly. " Anything wrong ? You can hear me, can't you ? "

" Yes."

He took out his pipe slowly, filled it slowly ; there was no need to hurry—all life a longing for what can never come. She would not move till he had spoken, if he sat all night. He watched her ; single dark hairs seemed to shift—or was it only a play of light ? He could not catch ; they tossed and she kept still. " Eve. I don't want to intrude myself upon you if you find your own thoughts enough for you."

She was silent.

" Is it only your thoughts that pain you ? Yes ? And you mean . . . your brows ? Aching ? M'm ? Hard and dry like a stretched string ? I know, and when every memory seems a stale horror. . . . I've left you alone too long . . . but, oh, you *told* me to go. Eve ? What was I to do ? You've set me a problem too hard ; I'm not blaming you. It's the way our lives have come on into this immobility." He paused again. " I think I love you ; or if not, I imitate it in my own way ; I'm seeing you in one vision for the last I don't know how many weeks. Memories of you pile up like composite pictures ; you've been one large suffering, haven't you ? Time has ceased to mean anything. And, too, whatever your head is like, mine has grown stale and slow ; and I think it is because I love you, and my hands and feet feel swollen and would be blackened and putrefying like leprosy must be, if it was so dark that I couldn't see them and assure myself ; and an awful wheel is turning somewhere with such slowness that it only shows how impossible it is to move at all. . . . Is that how you are feeling ? Yes, yes . . . I will wait for you to speak ; you know I'm here . . ." And yet it wasn't pathetic because pathos is so relative—something turned on like a tap ; and, as he watched her, he was certain she had been like this all the time ; and that of all his life with her this intolerably heated room was the rounded image. Essence had been strained off down to the sickly dregs, and here it stood like viscous fluid ; and with this—and with nothing more transitory —he had flung himself into love. What then was it ?

" Eve. Do you want to listen ? "

" I'm listening, Hugh."

" Let me tell you what I haven't told you. Not lately, if ever. Not all these stories about this thing or that I'd been

seeing in the streets and what I took for so profound and important interludes of life. . . . I am slow; do you mind? We have a long time. Dear, I don't understand this phase of you; it's no use pretending. Or how far it hurts you. But I feel you come to it as nature comes to moods that I . . . I wouldn't be without, dear, once I knew of them. I'm a small creature perhaps; I'm a humble creature . . . I seem to love what absorbs me and hides me from myself. One wants to put a hand over one's eyes—am I wearying you? No?—over one's eyes, because it's a strange discovery for a man to make, that he loves without selection."

"Hugh. Do you really love me, now? I've got no breath in me, no moisture."

"Oh, I do; but, my dear, I'm incapable of helping. What can I do for you? anything . . . anything, if I knew the way. Only talk is left; and to tell you that if you feel your mood interminable, then I will sit talking interminably. Just that; and I'm entangled in you like a web."

"Are you? It's no good . . ."

"No good," said he. "Well—but it may be; changes come, even when one scarcely feels them."

"No," she said. "Not to me. I think this will never break, unless I dry utterly and crack inside. Oh, the smell of these cushions . . . dusty." She drew herself from the folds of the chair and shook it off with a twisted face. "Yes. Yes. . . . Hugh. Do you feel it warm? Of course. And I closed up the windows; do you know why? I was afraid of the depths, and I looked down, where that flower-pot fell, and thought I should splash there like one drop of rain—so far; and I pushed up the window and *knew* that life holds its breath like me before a thunderstorm; and so you've found me, Hugh, so you've found me."

"I am here now."

"Yes. Come to bed."

"You want to?" he said. "Whichever you like. Here or there. To move . . . to undress and turn out lights will make no difference; there is no other world but the two of us."

When she seemed to struggle in the chair, he lifted her with his hands under her arms, and she said: "Parched is the word. I'm dying for desire of wetness. All the world to-day is full of pretences of colour and pretences of the amuse-

ment that *bubbles*, and the rain that flows like blood. Nothing real. I have given—I give up my right to be an animal, and no one thanks me for it. Do they? If I could change to a little diving bird and drop . . . drop. . . . Hugh, can you make me sleep to-night?"

And in bed, when darkness—spun forward—takes the place of time and the striking of hours becomes a meaningless form, they said at intervals: "Are you asleep?"—and replied: "No," and talked a little in those calm ordinary voices that are so dreadful at night. Then she stretched her bare arm out on the sheet, and he touched it with his finger-tips. "Are you feverish? No?"—but she was very still, coated with a smooth rind, he thought, that lets no life through.

"If I should go and die . . .," she said.

"But you won't."

"Perhaps not. Not in any way one can imagine. It doesn't matter; and I forget what it was. You'll go up to the office to-morrow."

"To-morrow? To-morrow?"

"It will come, you know," she said. "And it's here now. I'm saying this to prevent you falling into any silly trick of staying with me. What *is* to-morrow?"

"Saturday."

"M'm. . . . You've got to see, Hugh, that what I said, about looking out of the window, mustn't stop you going to the office. It won't happen. It wouldn't be any good to me and I know it. Promise me."

"Yes. If to-morrow ever comes."

"It'll come. Our eyes will seem as though they didn't belong to our sockets, and the tea will taste like hot water; but it'll come. Why don't you want it to come?"

She twisted round her head to him; he didn't reply; he was sitting with cheek on palm of his hand over her. He touched her arms again. She thought, and said: "Perhaps if you talked . . . anything; I don't mind. You were out this evening."

"I know; I know . . . but not that. That belongs to a different universe, a universe I'm quite willing now to believe imaginary. Since you're not there, I may never go there again."

She threw herself round in the bed fiercely towards him. "I don't believe you *want* me to be there; that's the truth. You put it all in a little pocket of your mind by itself. Why

won't you tell me ? Why don't you want to-morrow to come ? You've never let me share ; you might have fished out most wonderful things for me, but you never cared to. Oh, dear, oh, dear, why am I saying this ? Oh, I wish I could cry now as I used to, but it's all dried up. Hugh . . ."

He said : " I'll talk about the streets." His sensations had grown suddenly fibrous and unreal. He began to speak, and it felt like the tapping off of waste matter from aching limbs. " Yes, yes ; to-night I went . . . where ? Let me think. It'll start to flow in a moment, and have a little meaning. My lips are stiff. I went . . . into a small empty street, and its name was Brazil Street. I don't know why—because there's nothing tropical there except the heavy rain. And there I found a house, and it was number . . . number fourteen, where a family was to be evicted ; and nothing had happened. You say nothing ever happens ; but this expectation, it was almost too much for me ; and yet the house seems like all the other houses there and railings run down the street a foot, hardly more, in front of the windows ; but why there were railings I don't know ; only I remember gripping one spike with my hand while I stood and talked, and perhaps it was some old style, and this was once a street of the more prosperous, such as, small merchants or retired skippers ; that's how I imagine it. There's no light in the passages or on the stairs ; darkness and smell are so mixed that I really fancied the darkness was of a dusty tinge ; and greenish gusts of mouldiness and damp paper, and something unendingly oily and fatty from years after years of cheap cooking. . . . It was a siege ; *I* could know nothing, and what I guess now may be half dreaming. I remember that all other houses in the street may have sounded like this one if you stood under the doorway, but I thought it could be the only one where unexpected people crept out of doors, and had somehow arrived on the stairs like mice or rats. They were going to evict this family ; they may do it to-morrow—thrust them into the street, not quite as naked as they were born, but almost as naked. . . . Almost as naked as they were born."

He stretched out through her quietness and touched her arm ; it was soft and moist ; he exulted quickly in himself ; and she felt his fingers and the pause and moved her lips. " You needn't talk any more, Hugh. Needn't talk more." He had thought all the time his words were falling like dew,

and it was so, then. She seemed to lie sucking them into herself.

"You're going to sleep ?" he said.

"P'raps. Don't talk more. I feel as if I'd had . . . had ether given me without any smell in it. All drowsy. D'you think . . . d'you think they'll come and operate on me ?"

Later she was asleep ; and he turned himself over in the bed, and thinking himself a thing of power to have changed her so, he closed his eyes as a matter of duty.

When morning came, he could hardly wake her ; she looked at him and went to sleep again. He woke her. "Eve. Will you stay in bed ?"

"I am."

"Yes, I know ; but *stay* there and have breakfast . . ."

"Haven't you gone to the office yet ?"

"Not yet. Eve, listen a moment. I'll tell Mrs Lamb . . ."

"Go off. I can't wake up till you're gone. It's impossible. You're only an anæsthetic ; that's all you are."

"Don't be hurtful."

"I'm not being hurtful. It's all you are. Later on some one'll come and operate on me. Go *away ;* you worry me. I feel as if I was waiting to be born."

"But let Mrs Lamb know," he said.

"Later."

"Have something . . ."

"Later."

He told Mrs Lamb about it ; he had his breakfast and went off, without waking her again, pondering over the inanity of open air. A cold sun was there ; he meditated on immensity with odds and ends rattling about in it ; he had walked quickly out of the front door, and joined the odds and ends—a ridiculous vortex ; and, settling this, he took a quiet interest in the journey up and in his desk and its letters—the dilated interest of one who has no interests at all, and might as well look at a dirty thumb-mark on an envelope as at a corpse. Soon after midday he climbed on to a 'bus home. He sat in front surveying, in discreet patches, torn rags, the human collisions below, façades, sparrows ; he became an atomist. When he dived back through the front door and mounted his stairs, he thought of her as alive ; he waited for her presence, to lay himself in mood after mood of her through a week-end ;

she was perhaps still sleeping—he would not be astonished at that.

She was not even in the flat. He found a note on the dining-room table.

" It will do me good ; I'm going out to see Rachel. Probably. But I don't suppose I shall stay there, or we may go off somewhere together. Don't wait in ; I'll be back this evening and get supper, if you want it. I shall be back and better. Don't worry. Bless you.—EVE.

" *P.S.*—Don't get worried at all. I shouldn't write like this if I had any *deep thoughts*. You know I shouldn't."

Life is, of course, curious. One tightens lips into a thin line and conjectures ; one sits on the table-edge humming a while. " Er . . . Mrs Lamb. Eve's gone out . . . my wife's gone out, then, I see."

" You shall have your meal in only five minutes," said Mrs Lamb, out of the knife-drawer.

" Yes, but when did she get up ? "

" Get up ? "

" Yes," said he.

" I think it was directly you went out yourself."

" Oh . . . oh, I see. You've no idea . . . m'm, was she fairly fit ? "

" Very bright. She had a *good* night ; you ought to let her have *good* nights now and then, and not excite herself too much. It means a lot to a young married woman, and I'm sure you don't mind me saying so, any more than she does."

" No . . . h'h . . . no. No." He looked at her for a time with itching skin, and finding himself disinterested in all talk, said, " Yes. I believe you're wiser than either of us, Mrs Lamb ; don't you ? "

" Experience does tell," said Mrs Lamb, laying his cloth. " And a word in season is a word in reason, as the saying is, from whomever and to whom it may be. There's nothing to be ashamed of in having yourself looked to and studied ; not all can face learning their own lessons."

He sat looking across the table at a featureless sky. He found—meditating on it—that he was still surprised. Pleasure was it he felt ? Or loneliness and pain ? He sorted out his food ; and for a moment he was solicitous, and for a moment he was mild and gently amiable. A sweetheart of

his—a darling girl—that would discover for herself a harmony and rebirth. Rachel? Yes, it was better so. He nodded. Old featureless sky was a vacuum to be filled for three hours maybe—four hours. He thought about it and could not remain here. He walked the room. He thought about it, and after a while saw his body, as in dreams, running quickly down the stairs and into the world. He let it take its course, yawning at it.

Foot swinging on past foot and jump and roll of 'bus, not for a moment did the world's rags cohere; being rags, they were meaningless. Streets had a new taste, a tickling old metallic taste in his mouth; up into it, again and again, like a regurgitation came that sick and sad taste of wakeful night when the air grows fatigued and beyond time; it breathed, behind all the rags of phenomena, his woman only. It grew a hot and thirsty taste. He scraped his hand against a brick wall and looked at this pain, meditated the image of a hand in water hurt by a brick that fell through; life worked itself on outside him, three inches or more. Here one gets off—and into the intertwining, colliding, clanging thoroughfare of all races—city in thoughts—beak noses and dark eyes, blunt noses and shuffle, a pale face, an oil-brown face, shawls over heads, tie-pins, open throats, bleached skin with bitter lips, an almost black countenance with watchful white of eyes out of hidden docks; shop-windows are there like surfaces of an unbroken pool—tank after tank was inviting each of them an everlasting inspection—shoes in pairs, watches, ham half-cut, mouse-traps. To turn from the main thoroughfare on impulse is to drop noise down like a thud. Later one hears sparrows. Sometimes these small streets after rain are silver paper laid down; yes, they gleam. Houses sulk in afternoon light. Every corner is the opening of a dull microscopic view—bacterial shapes that glide, dart and collide—beyond even the thought that they can be touched with fingers. How one yawns for relief. Voices come and go. Here is a known street. One yawns. . . . In daylight its bricks are pink—liver, dirty intestinal pink. At this pub has one taken a glass. Afternoon pads softly like a cow towards one climax or another—no matter what—the meeting with such a face or such a face; many are asleep at this hour. One yawns at the thought. Here is a street well-known, perhaps the blunted climax of it all; street of evictions—Brazil, its fierceness and its glare

are germs only under coarsened skin with the sweat dry in the pores. Here is the street. Brazil—and the very name half-faded, and in the street a house, and by the door some concourse, a dozen peering in ; and there are faces at windows, and one says, " Something up " ;—and he hurried into it, but when he got there paused again and yawned. One noted there were more inside the doorway up to the stairs. Even he felt the listening—and nerves like a violin-string ; the string's note slid through all their whispers, women most of all. A recognized face, seen once over a glass of ale, knew him. " Hullo. Coming in ? Come in, then."

" No, no. I have no special right."

Way was made for him between elbows. " Yes, come on," and names were mentioned. " You know 'em ? You want to see 'em ? "

" No, no," said Hugh. " I can't do anything to help ; I've no reason more than you. . . ."

" That's all right. Come on. Way, mother." Passage was allowed in silence as through boughs pressed back ; hands on his shoulders helped him.

Another face met him. " Hullo. You've heard ; yes ? " The adenoidal boy had him by the arm. Breath and coughs were all round him ; and from above voices faintly heard, dropping like flint-dust, soft then raised, growling or argumentative or assertive. The crowd waited.

" I know nothing," said Hugh. " I've heard there's an eviction but it's only by chance I'm here to-day. Things are all quite mysterious."

" Eh ? Here, listen ; the old girl's up there. You understand, yes ? The old girl that *owns* this house . . . d'y'hear her ? There. There. Oh, Christ, and they've locked themselves in the room and two of our chaps are up there and some others. Oh . . . oh, oh . . . do you hear ? No, don't press. . . . I say, all you, don't press . . . see. Keep off the stairs ; I say, keep'm back ; see, we'll have her bringing in the cops. Ma, that's why we got to keep down. They don't all understand. What ? Unemployed ? Yes, yes, We're running it ; see, you got to explain to some of these prolies ; *they* don't understand what organization is . . . not yet."

" I'm going to get out," said Hugh. " It's stifling me. I'm not well to-day. . . . I'm swimming."

" Don't—don't do it. Here, help him," and the voices round

him chimed, queried, advised ; and they said : " Make way," and " He's gone faint," and " Take him upstairs." He was on the stairs, mounting from step to step with the boy at his elbow, and heard them asking who he was. A landing-window gleamed ; he was between earth and heaven. He said : " I'm quite all right . . . quite all right. Forgive me. You can almost hear them here." They had advanced still farther. He said : " Stop and let's listen. Stop. Why is she here—the landlady ? "

" Sh. Because she can't get hold of the Ejection Order from the Court . . . see ? Mad as hell about it and letting off at 'em. Christ, you ought to have been along. H'h. Oh, Christ, I laughed."

" H'm. Yes." He placed fingers on the boy's arm and stood listening to the voices above him with bent head. " Can you hear the words ? " His ears suddenly began to strain ; he was sucked forward up the stairs by a trembling curiosity. Banisters creaked and he released them, on tiptoe ; he was aware of doors open a crack, and eyes at them—the whole house celled with fierce curiosity. Then he stopped again and bent his head and heard husky tones on and on. " Y'll pard'n me, madam, but you have no legal status if you get what I mean to. . . ."

The boy's breathing whistled at his ear and he said : " Fff ! *I* don't want to hear any more ; I shall go down again," and again was bloated with curiosity, crept a few more stairs—and a few more.

Then all words were naked—dreadful. Down to a little laugh and a clearing of throats. Voices in the air were no longer flint-dust ; they stabbed, they bludgeoned, they corroded. In the very presence he stood panting.

" I'm going to ask you for the last time, *will* you allow me to speak to my own tenant ? "

" And I've told you, madam, as how the tenant has empowered me to act for him . . ."

" The position is ridiculous . . ."

" Ah, ridiculous, and who's making it ridiculous ? "

" I wanted so *much* to forestall any unpleasantness. . . ."

" You can make yourself easy on that score."

It was strange, he thought, listening here unseen ; and caressed his chin.

" I shall try, *once* more—I insist." Demur and movement

and laughter and smart rapping on door. Irritated oscillation of brass handle. " Are you *in*, please ? I want to see Mr. . . " Rat-ta-ta-plat. " I wish to speak to. . . ."

" Here, you ought to be ashamed of charging rent for a door that shakes like that when you rap it."

Hugh gasped. Had his heart stopped beating ? *What* voice ? *What* voice ? Eve's voice only, no other. He stared for a moment at his hand, her voice had seemed to fall on the dry skin like one heavy drop raising a blister. In a mad world he went mad ; he butted up the stairs like a bull, swung round corners. He heard last sounds—dissolution—footsteps that poured to meet him ; and he pushed quite regardless past a sealskin coat prancing down from stair to stair ; and he leaped to the topmost flight and saw the whole bunch of them —three, four, five—beating hands and rolling against the wall. There she was.

He mounted the flight very gravely. She was laughing, with bare head and hands on the hips of her big tweed overcoat ; she rocked—it swung unbuttoned, and round her neck was a red scarf loosely knotted. There was one spot of gleam, a brass bell in a man's hand—one answering red cry in another's button-hole. They laughed and they gesticulated ; beyond them lay the silent door, and the besieged family, that even now did not cheer. He mounted ; behind the door might have been a tomb. " And here," she said, " my boy is coming, right on the tick."

They were busy and self-important—they thrust and advised ; they had no time for him, and he saw it half-resentfully ; but she was holding his arm and murmuring to him in that spread and careless accent of hers.

" Yes, my dear ? " he said. " Yes ? "

" You tell me where I am."

" Where you are ? " said he, with hard eyebrows and deep in a strange exasperation at it all.

" Yes, yes—you tell me where I am. *You* tell me in your voice . . . out of nothingness." She closed her eyes drowsily. He told her merely, in a few dulled words, staring at her. She opened her eyes wide and smiled, and said : " Why, of course . . . But I had to know, hadn't I ? See, something broke inside my mind like a big pod, and you're the only rag of the old skin that's come to the surface for hours and hours. You. . ." Her face shone darkly into his and her lips were very

lazy. " I had to ask you to be certain it is still me. I'm glad for that reason that you've come, and that you're feelable. It's right, isn't it—m'm ? Places and times don't matter—m'm ? but one's mind can burst open and then all places and times might alter most seriously. Oh, dear ! "

He answered resentfully, like a stone dropped. " Rather a surprise, rather a shock. . . . What ? I feel half asleep."

" Is it, darling ? " she said. " Ye-es,"—and she crooned with falling eyelids over his arm, till he drew her down to the half-landing ; and there, though doors below them stood ajar, she was crooning to herself and swayed her body gently, musing sideways, as though she nursed her own spirit. He waited patiently ; it was not truly a surprise to him—but he felt all her actions drag him forward, drag him into the untraceable and the utterly obscene. It was always so. He shrank back from futurity.

She looked at him again. " Yes ? " she said. " It's possible to be reborn then. One's substance can split open—and yet not a baby drop through but one's own inner self, all soft and placid and perspiring. That must be what's happened. Queer, isn't it ? I dropped through here like a splash, and spread and spread. . . ." She began to play with the red handkerchief about her neck. " M'm ? Funny, isn't it ? Nothing worries. My body feels good and fresh. You're happy—m'm ? "

After a pause he asked : " How did it happen ? "

She didn't care to answer ; she turned her head. " Oh, I don't know. It was you saying Brazil Street, and then about being thrust out on to the cold, cold pavement. . . . It was like a knife drawing across my mind. I didn't realize. . . . I don't know why it was." She gazed into him. " Oh, smile, darling, smile ; you wanted this to happen, didn't you ? These people are life ; they smell of life ; they seem swollen with desire of it, even though they might tell you the opposite. I've found them—I feel suddenly enlarged over them like heavy water. They'll create this life more and more, and so shall I . . . with them, not anywhere else." She went drowsy again and took his arm.

" Perhaps we should go out," he said. " Come into the streets."

He drew her down the stairs. He was still pondering the future ; and she was still the indeterminate factor. What next ? He saw that she was right ; and that, whereas he

moved almost without change upon the tide of Masses, she had thrown herself among them in a strange organic readjustment ; she was a new creature, and he was perturbed by her. The crowds still clung about the doorway. She smiled gravely into their faces, and for the children outside she wanted to buy sweets. She lingered sluggishly over them ; it was some time before he could get her away and find, in the thoroughfare, a little tea-shop ; and here they sat with dark tea-cups, waiting till thought could find its appropriate resolution.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

" No, not really, I must go. Please don't encourage me to stay, dear ; *good*-bye . . . h'h, h'h . . . Mr Grimball ; *good*-bye, Maurice, and be good ; and, oh, no, no, Irene, I can quite see myself out please. Don't trouble. Oh, lovely, yes. M'm ? Oh, the wrong catch I was trying. Oh, that's it . . . h'h . . . how stupid. *Good*-bye, dear ; don't stop here in the cold."

" Good-bye, Laura."

" Oh . . . oh, you didn't mind my speaking about . . . ? "

" What ? About . . . ? No, I wanted to hear. You can be sure I wanted to hear. Oh, crikey yes, my dear girl, I should think I did." There were whispers, a door closed flat ; footsteps returned.

" Mmm, come and have a quiet cup now, m'dear," said Maurice.

" Yes, in a moment. Oh, you've put the light on ; do you want it ? Yes, I do prefer the shadows and the fire. Will you, Geoffrey ? Oh, thank you. I'll give you both another cup in a second ; let me get my breathing space. Yes . . . h'm . . . cold to-day, isn't it ? "

" Yes."

" One can think better in the dark ; it's comforting to switch on and off one's own light to prove it belongs to one ; I wish I could do it with the sun sometimes. Well, what do you think of the news ? Did you *get* it, Geoffrey ? "

" H'h'm. No. No, not really. She rather closed up when I arrived."

" Yes. Well, I want to talk about it *now ;* and you know most of the facts so far, so you might as well hear. That was Laura Franklin ; she's a good sort. She's helping a troupe of Girl Guides somewhere in the East End to paint the scenery for a play."

" Er . . . I'm listening," said Mr Grimball.

" You tell him, Maurice. I'm sorry ; I. . . . Somehow I can't collect my thoughts ; I'm tired out. You tell him the story."

" Oh, well . . . I don't know that it's very significant."

" Oh, I do."

" Let's hear what Geoffrey thinks. Mmm, it's just this ; Laura was going through the slums the other night . . . mmm—in a taxi, you know, when she saw my sister-in-law. . . er . . . Mrs Brabant, with a bunch of kids marching along, wasn't it ? Er . . . and she had a what-not, a red flag or red handkerchief, or something. H'h."

" What for ? " asked Mr Grimball.

" I . . . er . . . . really don't think Laura knew."

" Yes, of course, she did, Maurice," said Irene.

" Oh, did she, m'dear ? I'm afraid I must have mislaid that fragment. Perhaps she told *you*."

" You were there "—and firelit sudden rustle—" well, let's finish the story for Geoffrey, anyhow. She had a red handkerchief round her head, and some of the children had a flag with words on it. *That* was the actual fact, and Laura's Girls' Hall was close there, so she did casually ask one or two, and they said something about the Unemployed. Don't you remember at all, Maurice ? Unemployed giving a Christmas treat or tea. That's all."

" Mmm . . . could I worry you for another cup, m'dear ? "

" Yes, yes ; pass it over. I mean, this is a kind of occurrence one's got to talk about ; one has to approach it really rather carefully. I mean "—she said, with tinkling movements among tea-spoons, pauses and slurs to overcome the thirstiness in her voice—" I mean, it's a queer and mysterious thing to happen in a family ; why do you suppose they do it ? Don't they realize they cut themselves off from all the people one knows —and all the family ? I want to be . . . I want to be . . . oh, kind and broad-minded about what's occurring ; don't let's be dogmatic because there *is* such a thing as the scientific attitude. Oh . . . er . . . er . . . isn't there ? Isn't there ? "

" Mmm—yes, old dear," said Maurice. " Yes, quite agreed. Perhaps thinking along those lines it's best to . . . take no notice, and let it run its own course. What ? "

" Oh, I don't agree with you at all. That's not being scientific. No, no, one's got to talk about it." She sucked at her tea and set back the cup. " Oh, I've spilt some . . . oh, damn it. No, no, only on the cloth ; *leave* the light. . . . What was I saying ? You see, I don't want to suggest that they haven't a perfect right to mix up with these unemployed and navvies, coal-heavers, tramps, anything they like ; temperaments *do* vary ; but . . . we have to consider repercussions on other people. I mean, the unsociable kind of behaviour is nothing in itself . . . is it ? "

" Well, I don't hold with that," said the voice of Geoffrey, puffing out of shadows. " I . . . er . . . don't."

" Don't you ? "

" H'h'm . . . *your* relations. I don't want to butt in."

" Yes, but you think . . ."

" Well, I do," said Geoffrey Grimball, ridding himself gradually of a huskiness. " Very charming of you and all that to give them the benefit of the doubt, to talk about it as if it were a queer way of dressing or eating. I mean," said he with a heave, " working up political feeling, y'know, and unrest isn't what you can play at. It has consequences. I've heard a thing or two lately. . . ."

" About *them ?* "

" No . . . er . . . no. H'h'm. Just in general. You can never really uproot all the scum out of society by prisons and asylums and so forth ; my experience, too, among the nigs . . . devilishly difficult to pick them *all* out, to be certain you've hooked 'em all ; and then, of course, you get damn fool cranks taking up the same underground work and giving it an appearance of being *pukka*—being real white man's point of view ; and that's the worst possible influence, absolutely the worst you could conceive, on the poor crowd that don't know. God ! "

" Mmm—I say, it's a bit strained ; what ? " said Maurice.

" Strained," said his wife. " Where ? This is just what you and I have to learn ; after all, Geoffrey's had experience."

" Well . . ."

She was moving hands irritably among cups, brushing skirts ; the room in firelight grew anxious—the males didn't

fancy obscurity. She broke in. " I want to hear anyhow. One can't . . . one can't . . . one can't, I mean, afford to be ignorant in these days. And what do *you* think of Eve, Geoffrey ? I never found out that ; you've seen enough of her to judge. And m'm, m'm . . . it goes out of one's head. I'll ask you about Eve later, but I want to know ; because *I* . . . don't . . . know ; I really don't know what to think. But do you think there's any chance of terrible disorder ? Do you ? "

" Some of us will have to tighten up our backbones and get cool . . ."

" No, no, listen. You see, Hugh gave himself away the other Sunday ; he said something that opened up depths I never thought of ; is it possible ? These people themselves can do it ? So many of them ? You see . . . I'm not alarmed, Geoffrey, but I want you to tell me, and, of course, I know they couldn't carry it on for long, but they might get just enough—you know what I'm referring to—of the rudiments of organization to burst out spasmodically and hurt most horribly. I mean, don't go into any details, because I don't want to hear about the natives, and I've sometimes thought I'm glad I'm not among natives. I couldn't really stand it with Paul . . . and everything."

Her husband rose and said, " Old girl, this darkness . . . what ? Starting to get on my nerves. H'h. What about it ? " He switched on the light—and switched it off again, and said, " Beastly bad for the eyes to have a sudden glare ; I'll open the door first and let in the hall-light." He went round to bend over her.

She said, " Yes, yes ; it's getting a little late ; I saw the clock. I shall have to run up to the nursery." She disappeared to wash her cheeks and eyes gently, and take an aspirin.

A little later, after the two gentlemen had spread an hour's cooling trivialities over any suspicion of awkwardness, one hinted of washing hands—there was Geoffrey's plan of a little dinner to them in some quiet restaurant, maybe drop into the Café afterwards or have a dance. Maurice turned on the taps humming, " You wash first ; I'll go and tell her the time." He meditated, humming. Resentment began to tickle. " Mmm—I say, Grim, old man, better not confuse her . . . what ? . . . between handling niggers and dissecting the

situation over here." He felt the water and crossed to wipe his fingers.

"How d'you mean?"

"It agitated her up a bit. Naturally. It's . . . not the decentest thing."

Geoffrey in shirt-sleeves twisted over his shoulder. "I've done nothing. Decent? What d'you mean by that? I maintain I've said or hinted nothing."

"The old kid's upset."

". . . Oh, well, believe me, and I am speaking with the most damnable sincerity, I'd be the last person you could find to hurt her by word *or* deed. Absolutely. And you know that, and I don't think you're justified in accusing me. You know that . . .," he said, soaping his hands mechanically and clearing a huskiness. "You *know* that, and what I mean . . . to suggest that *I* would frighten her, when I'm only trying to alleviate her fright. H'h . . . what's that?"

"Didn't say anything."

"H'm."

"All the same," said Maurice, "I am going to make one comment; and that is, I don't think you ought to introduce this stuff about natives. These fellows are white. . . ."

"Eh?"

"I say, they're white fellows and that makes a difference."

"There you are, y'see. First go off you show you're wallowing in simplicity; my dear man, half the touts we're really after aren't white; bloody Oriental scum like Jews and Russians. Half? Three-quarters at least; only difference is that if we had 'em in their own country we could use proper understood methods to keep 'em civilized, but because they're under the British sky the damn Government loses every atom of perspective. . . ."

"Very well, what's it to do with you?"

"Very well, we've got to keep our sense of civilization jolly refined and skinned, and have eyes like *gimlets* for this kind of subversive insinuation. . . . And why d'you say *me* only? I bet you there are thousands as conscious as I am and we're damn well not going to do the dirty work for any weak-kneed lazy swipe that likes to squat behind us and say 'Haw, I'm the civilization they're defending.' We'd enough of that during the War."

" Well," said Maurice, " I don't object to you talking about it ; tell *me* as much as you like."

" Now, look here, you're just bleating. If . . . er . . . Irene asks me point-blank, am I going to tell her lies ? That tout Brabant told her something . . . *you* know ; she said so herself—and I've never found you can't tell the whole truth to a white woman ; in the Indian Mutiny . . ."

" This isn't the Indian Mutiny."

" No, by God, it'd be a simpler proposition if it was. Here, d'you want to wash now ? I'm through, if you'll lend us a brush a mo'." The water plunged again. " May I have a brush, Ship ? "

" You know where it is."

" Er . . . in the drawer ? "

" M'm."

A little later in the measurement of hours, coffee at a select restaurant and cigarettes with unhurried breathing ; where to go on ? Maurice, vaguely ruffled, thought a dance " at the Marionettes, m'm ? Not far from here ; I'm a member ; or we might even go to . . ."

" Only three of us."

" Oh, well, pick up someone there perhaps, pick up there."

Irene was sick of dancing. " I'd rather sit quiet."

" Mmm—then the Café ? " Too large, too abundant. Ideas narrowed themselves desperately ; Maurice tapped a cigarette, kept tapping.

Irene fluffed her hair, waited a moment. " Well, hasn't anyone suggestions ? What about the . . . Pantaloon ? Or what's its name, Lime Tree ? "

" We're not members of the Lime Tree."

" Pantaloon then ; it doesn't matter much." Maurice tapped, didn't think much of the people there ; she eyed him. " I don't care who we meet. Don't want to run away." She left the table ; and Maurice mumbled that she seemed magnetized down to the blasted place ; Geoffrey Grimball, blinking his eyelids, looked at pieces of silver and Maurice said again, " . . those people there—I don't want to meet them, y'know ; Hugh, and so on. Some families can't help quarrelling."

She came back and said, " Maurice, get a taxi. It's raining." They sat dressed to go, and she drummed fingers on the table-cloth dreaming into electric light ; she turned suddenly to

Mr Grimball. " What do *you* think of Eve ? Hugh's wife, I mean. Do you imagine he put her up to all this ? "

" H'h'm. Well . . . I don't know."

" I used to refuse to believe she was really a bad sort ; didn't you ? What you've seen of her."

" Oh, I . . ."

" You were a bit struck on her once."

" I'd say she was good-looking in a way ; but . . . h'h."

" Yes, you were. You're actually blushing. Oh, you *were*. . . . What's the good of denying it. Well, I know what it means when you accuse other people of being mad, but honestly in all charitableness, I believe she's a bit light-headed. You know. *Happy*, so to speak. She takes up a thing on a kind of instinct, before she knows she's done it ; drops it in the same way." Mr Grimball appeared to give it meditation. " Don't you think so ? " she said.

He let himself drop weakly into the gulf. " Ye-es, ye-es ; you may be right. . . ."

The taxi arrived.

They sat in the Pantaloon, she with a port and the men drinking whisky ; colour in glasses on the bare pauperized tables. The room was well filled, and black with clattering voices everywhere like castanets, where the tympanum is irritated by the need of dissecting every word addressed to it ; and then some one runs fingers down the piano ; the seats of the men's trousers began to bake and tingle on this thrown together crowd of chairs and backless benches. Grimball was silent, distinguished non-English accent and Jewish nostrils ; Maurice felt the heat ; his wife changed her position, and laughed—then looked at him for a while thoughtfully and talked to Grimball about comfort in clubs. They all had twinges of isolation ; Maurice's nerves came out at last, and he remembered that she'd said she didn't care for this place.

" Not for ordinary uses," she replied. " That's what I said ; it's interesting as a certain aspect of life."

" What sort of aspect ? "

" It depends what you're after at any moment," said she.

" Fff. They do heat this room. I often wonder what the devil I took out a card here for." He began to tap a cigarette. " It expires soon anyway."

" What is that you're mumbling to yourself about, Maurice ? "

" Only commenting on my membership card."

" Adventurousness isn't one of your prominent qualities. Give us one of your cigarettes, Geoff . . . Egyptian, please. That's Lipper just come in. I dislike that man, don't know why ; don't want to bother to think why. I just dislike him. What ? Oh . . . oh, thanks ; a light. Thanks. What's the *smell* always up here ? Not dust exactly ; some kind of paint is it ? . . . That woman in dark green passing the table there —you remember her, one of *their* friends."

" A Jewess," whispered Mr Grimball.

" Is she ? Hagen, isn't that the name ? You remember, Maurice ? "

" M'm ? "

" Do you remember . . . h'sh . . . the name of that woman ? Don't look round ; she's coming here. How do you do ? Long time since. . . ."

Rachel in feather-greens said vaguely, " Hu'o ! how are you ? " She smiled—iridescent and lazy in bright leaves or plumage—and looked them over. " May I sit here ? Sweet of you. *Your* . . . name's Grimball ? I remember you once before here, eh ? " She flowed down between them ; jade ear-rings swung a moment, painted wooden beads castaneted, purple-green and berry-red. " You don't often come here. I wanted to ask you. . . ." She hitched a shoulder, broke off, and looked down the room. " I wanted to ask you. . . ." She gathered in their waiting faces, and together, she and Irene, said, " Have you seen Eve, lately ? " and Irene tightened her lips and refused to smile.

" That was funny," said the Jewess. " Wasn't it funny ? Let me see ? Ten days ago. Ye-es, ten days."

" Heavens ! that's recent history. We haven't heard from them—what is it, Maurice ?—almost a month since we were down home, and now it's next door to Christmas. I suppose they're coming down to Surrey for Christmas. *We* haven't heard."

" Oh, no-o-o. I don't think so, my dear ; Hugh and Eve . . . they're coming away with me. And some others. Up to a cottage in the Chilterns. See, I kno-ow it ; it was arranged."

" That's sudden. Have they told our family ? "

" Me ? Eh ? Am I to know ? " She shrugged, laughing and grimaced. " I suppose they have." She looked curiously

at Grimball. " What do you and I calculate as strangers ? Does one inform one's family . . . eh ? "

" H'h'm . . . I do anyway," said Mr Grimball.

" Ah, well, maybe. Perhaps we do after all. Then they have."

" Because I think," asserted Mr Grimball, " that sense of loyalty and consideration ought to begin at home."

" Oh, ye-es. H'h. Why, of course." She smiled at him and grew inattentive. Her eyes wandered. " Oh, Silberstein's come. I suppose you know Silberstein ? I want to persuade him to. . . ." She drowsed off with dreamy distant eyes between inertia and flight. " I must ca-atch him."

Irene fidgeting, flushed and paled, looked helplessly round. Maurice murmured that they might all be drifting off. Irene, in a hard voice, jerked the words like coins, " Do *you* know what these interests of theirs are . . . down in the slums and among the Unemployed ? "

" M'm ? Do I . . . what did you say ? "

" I . . . I mean all these organizations with badges and banners, or what are they ? "

" Yes ? "

" I mean, are they going to write a book about them ? " and she strung the words on a wire of metallic laughter, and kept edging her glass this way and that.

Rachel said seriously, " Oh, no-o-o. Why should they ? They like to do it ; it is the revolutionary movement, you know. Why not ? "

" My wife means," said Maurice, " that they haven't confided in us, and we're naturally interested ; don't you, dear ? "

" No, I don't. I never have known Hugh become confidential. I'm merely wondering, entirely in a conversational mood, how Hugh might be entertaining himself . . . just that. What do *you* think is Hugh's attachment to the slums, the working classes ? " She blinked rapidly over at Rachel.

" Wouldn't you know better than me ? " said Rachel, with eyes half-asleep and no smile. " Eh ? He's your brother."

There was silence ; Maurice tried to gather glances and make a move ; but she—this Hagen—had suddenly settled in again, down in a kind of nest ; and he could see her bosoms rising up in short swells and dropping in short ebbs, and

breath expelled through her broad nose ; she pondered. He felt himself sitting stiff like a ventriloquist's dummy, counting seconds.

She said, " It's all politics. I suppose you've no objection *to them?* "

Mr Grimball interrupted, like a boil-over. " It's not politics. It's the end and contradiction of all politics to stir up mobs like this, and go on, and go on, till an absolute reign of terrorism is established, and then they're happy."

Rachel, who'd felt this interruption in his face ten minutes before it came, turned on him. " Oh, and what do you know about it, my son ? Mobs, eh ? Then listen, I tell you there is no such thing as mobs ; no, there is not. You say . . . mobs ; like that. H'h ! Well, even the peasants are not a mob . . . yes, even the ignorant peasant in the inside of Russia or Poland, or South Germany—let us say—where I come from. They build up their . . . *zemstvos*, their co-operatives, their peasant parties. H'h ! I like your *mob*."

" Do *you* take part in these Bolshevising expeditions ? " said he.

" See, what's that to do . . . ? "

" It has a lot to do with it ; I'm very interested. . . ."

" Oh," said Irene, twisting round her rings. " I don't see . . . I don't see what anything has to do with anything. Where are we ? What are we getting to ? "

" Russia," said Mr Grimball.

" Oh, Geoffrey . . ."

" Russia ? " asked a new figure, that probed its way with long nose and long fingers to their table, and swung a chair among them. " Russia ? Oh, I say, what a subject."

Rachel brushed him aside, " Close up, Charles ; you know nothing."

He was back like a fly, with fingers as so many legs over the table. " I know heaps about it, and I protest at being told to close up, Rachel. D'you want to know ? In Russia last year there were fifteen thousand more cases of embezzlement of funds by officials than any year before the War."

" In Moscow," said Grimball, " there are thirty per cent. more prostitutes than . . ."

" In . . . in . . . in Petrograd. No, listen. In Petrograd the Chairman of the Soviet was found in a brothel two days ago by some Unemployed and beaten senseless."

" Will you shut up ? I don't want to see you again, Charles. Tired. Finished. You . . . agh ! . . . like a mosquito ! "

Maurice tried to rise ; chairs jammed him ; his wife was quivering, brushed over an unnoticed glass. " Please, please. You. How rude you all are. I ask a personal question, and you go to . . ."

" Mmm, m'dear, don't you think we'd better go ? "

" No, no. I shall ask if I want to. Miss Hagen . . . she's the quietest of the lot of you ; I wish none of you were here. Yes, yes, men, of course, only men. *Miss* Hagen, I want to ask you, what does my sister-in-law find to interest her—you know her better than I do—in these crowds and crowds of working men and women ? I mean, she didn't before. Did she ? "

" Well, I suppose one is allowed to change one's mind, m'm ? "

" But it seems so incomprehensible."

" Agh, go along. I understand her—look—like I understand the colouring of that bead. Eve, she's the same as me, primitive and peasant ; I found one way of getting bright colour, strength, and having my own way a little in this civilization."

" Don't you . . . er . . . keep a shop ? "

" Yes, I do keep a shop, as you say ; and Eve, I knew she would have to do something, if not this—something else ; what does it matter ? She has to have things strong—big smells and tastes all round, and colours that hurt ; she pretended she didn't, but I . . . I got a body that echoes, and I *feel* the same in her, and she wants to be what we call *behaglich* . . . you haven't a word, but you are all drilled and correctly have to walk always on your soles, forward very pert and delicate." She saw or pretended to see someone at the far table ; she smiled, and said, " I will have to leave you. Good-night." She rose and the green fell about her like water ; glum expressionless faces had the sensation that something had been dragged out of the well of their table ; there was silence.

" I say, a bit mad, what ? " said the long-fingered shape. Mr Grimball merely grunted. Maurice grunted. They were rude to one another for five minutes, and then left in a body, creating no interest.

Mr Margarietson walked with a stick through the thin spaces of a country-house in the middle of December mornings. The stick was barely necessary. He kept it as an attribute, till he should go—till he should mildly go ; and in a day or so that would be. Into the drawing-room for a paper, upstairs for a book, down again for that cup of coffee Mrs Brabant would send him, and looking out of stair windows as he passed at the bare chestnuts. Mrs Brabant carried in his coffee herself.

" What ? A thousand thanks. Do permit me. . . ."

" Sit quite still, M. I can get the table for you."

" I feel," said Mr Margarietson, honestly, " a sudden malingerer. *Thank* you, lady. The fire ? Yes, supremely adequate ; just as I like it."

" Then *you*'re seen to," said Mrs Brabant with her croak of a laugh and fondling noises—brisk and with back to the blaze ; she took a cigarette. " You can't stay over Christmas, M. ? "

" No, no," said Mr Margarietson, after swallowing and through his silk handkerchief. " Again, thank you, but . . . wonderful coffee . . . you see, I think it must be. No. No. I won't pretend I'm regretful for these complications that kept me so long in your delightful company, but . . . well, *les affaires*, you know. I cannot ignore them any further. And there's the family."

" The family ? Oh ! " She blinked at him. " I don't know whether I told you, M., that Hugh . . ."

" *My* family, I meant."

" M'm ? " said she.

" Christmas, you know. The usual gatherings."

" Oh. Oh, yes, of course."

" You said—Hugh ? I interrupted."

" I said . . .? Oh, I was only going to say that Hugh and his wife aren't coming down this time. That's just by the way. I meant . . . I meant there would be plenty of room, M."

" Ye-es. Charming. And how is friend Hugh ? "

" Oh, all right. He never says much in his letters. Er . . . M."

" My dear lady, you have all attention, you know."

" H'h. I *do* wish you could get Arthur to understand, properly and simply, about Hugh's curious obsessions. I'd like to try, but I feel I have no power of expression that will

penetrate to Arthur. Or I don't comprehend Hugh myself. Or something. Irene won't tell me and really, M., between ourselves alone she's pathetically biased against Hugh ; it almost makes me weep. I'm sure you know what it is ; since he married. . . . You see, Irene's view of it all is so ill-proportioned that if Arthur only heard that . . . and he *must* realize sometimes that things aren't right. . . . Don't you imagine he must ? Hugh means so well. *You* can put matters in such a clear and scientific way. Could you, M. ? "

" I could try. Where is the old man, by the way ? "

" Arthur ? I . . . don't know. In the stables ? "

" Probably. He's one of these evasive animals ; too large for protective coloration."

" You will do it, M. ? "

" Assuredly. Assuredly."

" Hugh is *so* unhappy," said Mrs Brabant, wandering to the door. Mr Margarietson looked at her and listened politely. " He never *chooses* to do outrageous things. He deserves a lot from all of us." Mr Margarietson listened politely. She vaguely straightened a vase. " Well . . . comfortable ? H'h. Bye-bye."

" Good-bye." Mr Margarietson put on muffler, heavy coat, gloves ; with stick he faced the frozen drive, expressing in his features no opinion about it. He walked on to the lawn and round the alligator tank—brooded into it—walked between the chestnuts and set himself slowly for the stables. There was, one recalled, a stove in the stables. It was gratifying, since one had to inhabit such a place.

Mr Brabant was alone, covering with pencil lines a large sheet of cartridge-paper on top of the hay-bin ; he moved only his eyes when the door opened, showing the full whites of them—bent over his pipe.

" I may come in ? " said Mr Margarietson.

" Take a seat. Half a mo'. Your foot . . ."

" Don't disturb yourself, Brabant ; I've already chosen my place ; " and he perched, a dark owl, on a packing-case against the stove, and laid his foot gently on another case ; with raised eyebrows he disapproved up into the cold loft. The cage that transformed one stall was silent. Mr Margarietson studied the hay-bin.

" Fff . . .," said Mr Brabant, and scrabbled rapidly over his pencil lines and turned the paper upside down.

Mr Margarietson said, " You are designing . . . ? "

With white of eyes appearing a moment, Mr Brabant said, " Oh, nothing much. More permanent heating arrangements for the . . . dormitory. Inside compartment. I . . . h'm I . . . only rough fittings so far. Let's see now. Funny creatures, kinkajous."

" They're asleep ? "

" Just now. They're more or less nocturnal, you know. But if you like, I'll . . ."

" H'h, no, no ; don't disturb them. I can see the ends of their straw, and I'll take them for granted. I'd just as soon sit digging out thoughts as digging out kinkajous. It fascinates me as much." He slowly shredded tobacco.

" You don't mind me carrying on ? " said Mr Brabant.

" My dear fellow . . ."

Mr Brabant ruled a straight line. Mr Margarietson selected the first match and said, " So Irene and family are coming down for Christmas ? "

" Er . . . yes. Yes."

" And her young boy, I suppose ? "

" Yes. He'll come."

" You're to be congratulated on him. But . . . I prefer girls ; I'm glad—with the calm joy of pure reason—that I have only girls, and trust they will add unto me . . . granddaughters alone. . . . Yes. It's true that I *have* taxed myself with nursing sour grapes in my bosom, so to speak ; I used to question myself severely. But I've acquitted myself. Yes. I find myself a coldly rational creature. A wise man keeps women about him . . . women—the sex essential. The number—indifferent. As many as you like, and of whatever facet of relationship. "

" Good God ! " said Mr Brabant.

" Oh, tradition, I'm quite well aware, is against me. If we're to believe tradition, we males are not males, till there is a son to show for it—and a son's son—and so forth *ad indefinitum*. *If* you worry about traditional values. . . . But sober sense—and I'm a very sober man—advises me to beget women, and, if necessary, acquire them ; they infect one's life with a more conservative element, more poised and more smoothly navigable. Even the most free-thinking of them. A man," said Mr Margarietson, replacing his pipe, " is happier so . . . if less self-important. M'm ? "

" The real trouble about a lot of women," replied Mr Brabant, " is that they're so respectful and awed. Awed. Conservatism and poise are all right in their way. But what I find about women is that they never have enough familiarity with politics and general military clap-trap to give them a decent streak of contempt for . . . *you* know. Contempt. Sort of thing I feel, and you feel, though you invert it all with your paradoxes and somehow stand it on its head. Women are all so easily shocked."

" Leaving your . . . h'h, h'h, your *very* typical interpretation of my attitude to politics and so on, what women are you referring to ? What category ? Wives ? Cousins ? "

" Eh ? No real exception. Wives, daughters, cousins . . . Look at Mildred on her particular brand of religion ; and yet you'd say she wasn't a bigoted woman. My mother was about the only one I've known that. . . ." Mr Brabant consulted notes and dropped two leaves.

" That understood contempt ? "

" Yes. Yes. That could accept it ; not exactly participate in it, but didn't get ruffled with it."

" H'm. Well, study your household over Christmas, my dear fellow. Study it in the light of my reasoned advice to males. See if you aren't happier. You'll have the chance ; just your women . . . and their harmless appendages."

" Appendages ? " said Mr Brabant.

" Er . . . Maurice and the child, you know. There will be no others, I gather."

Mr Brabant said, " How goes the time, M. ? Wouldn't you like to see the kinkajous before lunch ? Maybe the only chance."

" They've done me no harm," said Mr Margarietson, looking at the dark hole. " I'm comfortable and amused." He drew in smoke. " Ye-es. I should certainly study it over Christmas if I were you. Indeed, my profound knowledge of you makes me think you're already a convert ; but I have a duty . . . h'h . . . to get you to realize it. Yes. This contempt, I would say, needs a sedate and balanced milieu for its exercise, m'm ? A conservatism and respect for custom such as the female of the species always supplies so adequately. I have a vast confidence in Nature. The eccentricity of the stag's antlers is excused . . . and counterpoised . . . by his harem. I beg your pardon ; you said ? "

" I may go away for Christmas. I don't know. Festival I loathe. May get away. A fellow must try his paces alone sometimes."

" My dear chap! Excuse me laughing. A sudden decision ? "

" I didn't realize what I was in for," said Mr Brabant, " till you mentioned it. I . . . wait a moment ; can't find. . . . I must find someone with whom I can throw up my heels a little. Women stifle me. *You* can stay ? "

" H'h, h'h. Sorry."

" I'm a lonely cuss, M.—don't you think ? There *used* to be men—Lord knows what's become of them. Where are they ? You move about a bit. It's this blasted War or something that gave them the habit of stiffening up their faces when one says a word about old George Windsor—you know the way I talk. Men used to be cynical. . . ."

Mr Margarietson said : " Brabant," labially and softly.

" No go. I must have one of the damn measurements wrong. Which is it ? Three-ten, four-six. . . . God curse it, I'll have to run through 'em again. Wait a mo'. *Three*-ten. . . ."

" Brabant ! " cried Mr Margarietson, cracking his stick upon the stove-top. Mr Brabant's arms dropped loosely to his sides. He didn't start. His body quivered a moment—then craved. He looked round a shoulder under his brows.

" My dear chap," said Mr Margarietson, coldly, " you have to be warned. You're unsafe. Do realize that the world is changing radically ; and if you want still to be eccentric, then be quietly eccentric among your women. You like quiet ? "

" Well . . ." He tried to bring his pipe to his lips.

" And so do I. Yes, and so do I. Now men to-day are very serious animals . . . women are, too, but it's all right if you keep comfortably to your harem. Women in a bunch always allow for lightness—cynicism—in a man ; they know it can be sterilized by mere numbers. Stick to your harem as I do."

Mr Brabant said : " Look here—what suits you doesn't necessarily suit me. Eh ? Let's be clear. Eh ? "

" You've got to be warned," repeated Mr Margarietson, closing languidly his eyelids. " Men are too serious ; they no longer understand you. Your women-folk, on the other hand. . . ."

" What ? What ? I can't follow you ; I really can't follow you. . . . My head's full of figures, and this abstract twaddle merely worries 'em, and . . . for Christ's *sake*, M., open your eyes and look human."

Mr Margarietson opened his eyes and said : " H'h. Sorry, my dear fellow. H'h-h'h."

" My pencil point," said Mr Brabant, weakly, " I've broken it."

" My excess of energy with the stick. Forgive it. May I sharpen it as a penance ? No ? Perhaps. . . ." He hummed awhile. " Perhaps this is not the most accommodating place for a philosophic mood after all. But tell me before we close . . . you don't agree with me in my preference for women—and yet *is* there any male company you'd turn to ? *Is* there any man who takes your precise sardonic attitude towards political manœuvring, say . . . or the decorative functions of the Crown, or what is coarsely termed Jingoism ? Do you know any ? "

" I told you, I was lonely."

" Yes, I know. But isn't there anyone ? I seem to recollect the other day we were on a subject such as this, and you mentioned somebody. Was it . . . ? Yes. Why, yes, it was Hugh." He struck an idle match. Mr Brabant said nothing. " Now about friend Hugh," remarked Mr Margarietson, " I know, of course, very little ; you may be right and you may not. . . ." He suffered speech to rarefy into thought and gazed smoking at the loft. A minute passed. " Our young men nowadays," said he to Mr Brabant's back, " are a strange crowd. They affect me alarmingly. What do you think ? "

" M'm ? "

" We, I remember, used to sneer at our elders, but they. . ."

" Hugh never sneers at me," said Mr Brabant, suddenly.

" My dear chap . . . h'h, h'h . . . I know very little about Hugh. I was meditating at large. Indeed, I was just going to say that these young men have ceased to sneer ; they are painfully serious and energetic. They exclude quiet. They seem to be infected with a kind of rabies that thins down the barrier between thought and action, thins it down and wears it away. They bite out at you like a snake. The trouble of it all is," he brooded, " these are queer times." He stared at Mr Brabant's shoulders ; they were quivering and jerking spasmodically and no answer came.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

MEANWHILE the mind of Eve contemplated its world. In the depths was stillness. Momentum downwards ceased—and there lay her mind spreading and absorbing without haste. She moved heavily ; and, as she moved, she was swollen with a thousand new sensations and desires. She felt herself received and not questioned ; and, indeed, she was received because on her part she questioned nothing. She became an open gulf for all she experienced—faces and streets and rooms. She saw black beetles that crawl from under floors at night, and in the morning are trodden unawares ; and that was life. Wall-paper peeled from walls ; and that was life. They were not beautiful, but problems of life to be brooded sullenly—of creeping black froth from under floors and slime deep in the nature of walls. These were her life now ; they had always been her life, if she had let herself feel it so.

For a time she was contented. Day after day passed ; and each day bore its incident. There was an old flower-woman whose boy had been sent away—to a reformatory—because he was only fifteen and had grabbed a cake off a stall, and no one quite knew why ; not why he had grabbed the cake. She took a bunch of mauve daisies and frowned over it all ; and she said to the flower-woman, " I don't know why I should buy these flowers, because it won't help him, and it won't help you to get him out, and *I* don't want 'em."

" Wasn't that he didn't have enough to eat . . ."

" No, no, but why ? It was a cake, wasn't it ? Just one cake. I'd like to know why, and it's more important for me and you to know why than to buy flowers ; and they've taken him away. But I'll have the daisies after all." She felt they would be insignificant charity in a pot above the black beetles, and she gave them away, one by one, to children in the streets, and lost them.

" Don't mind if you want to," said the unemployed man with the thick nose. " No harm. Come along now ? Why certainly ; she'll be putting the baby to bed. She's a red, she is. Ah. . . . A red she is. She'll tell you a thing or two."

When he had at last gone in and spoken, " So long as *she*

don't mind," said the woman. " Come in," and looked at her and said, " take a seat, dear." Eve washed the baby with slow sweepings of the flannel down its legs and arms. The woman said, " The sixth ; but two's dead. Only I don't talk about that to him ; it's hurt him. Sometimes I think just as well, sometimes I don't ; less in the old fight, when you look at it that way. I always says that when a kid dies—when I see a kid's funeral in our streets—One less for the old cause, I says." She was a red. It was here the paper peeled in slime from walls.

Hugh was there, often. Eve kept catching the presence of him out of the corner of her eye—and turning her head about to get him into perspective. He leaned against a cold post at a street corner on the way home and said, " You won't do that about the police-station will you ? "

She said, waving her head, " Oh, well, it makes me wild. *She* don't know why they should put him away . . . for a cake. Stealing, of course, they called it, but I want to know. . . . She sat behind the flowers and couldn't speak, she stammered so ; she wanted to burst."

" Yes, I realize. But you must settle down to the sense of the system, bolted and padlocked and stretched tight everywhere you look ; it has no vent-holes for that kind of thing."

" You're cramping. . . ."

" No. I'm not," he answered. " But you must see. . . . If you do this one day—or if you work against an eviction one day—the next or the next after you'll resist the police. Or tear down a Union Jack."

" Well, and that's on'y quod, and I don't mind about that, or worse than that ; and if they shot at me, it'd only be blood . . . and blood is a glorious colour, and I've never loved mine before."

" Eve . . ."

" P'raps I imagined you must feel the same. P'raps I was wrong. You're critical ; your eyes nowadays, they give me the sensation of tying me round in pieces of string—nasty mean knotted pieces of string."

He said coldly, opening out his hands, " Quite the contrary. You agonize *me*. We shouldn't approach the workers in this self-indulgent way."

" Meaning me ? "

" Oh, and *me*. We both come into the vortex for peculiar reasons of our own, emotional reasons that are not theirs ; we have to learn."

She complained and frowned and twisted her sash. " As a matter of fact you're quite right ; aren't you ? M'm ? I s'pose you usually are. But then if it's bound to be so, it's bound to be so. If my nature drives me to this, it's my nature. . . . You don't see ? "—and she said, " No, I don't want a cigarette," when he offered her one, and she went across and teased little bits of loose mortar out of the dried corner-house and felt up the pocked layers of brick.

She sat in the mornings painting large wooden boxes and chairs in one colour—apple-green or red or deep orange. She'd said to Rachel, " Here, I want some work ; but it must be big. Big stuff, chairs and tables."

" Why ? "

" No designing. I'm sick of the small designs. It fidgets me. You do have single tones ; I've seen 'em."

" But why ? "

" Why ? Why do it at all ? I want some money to spend on my own . I don't want the damned chairs, but I want the money."

" Immaterial. Just what you prefer. But won't you, please, perhaps a tiny design occasionally, my own ? M'm . . . see, like that. Very easy and it makes all the difference."

" Oh, that. Pay me more then."

" You shall have ten per cent more, love "—and Eve went up and worked in the back shop ; and corners of the flat were blocked out of sight with box-piles, and chairs in brown paper and corded together. Vans brought and withdrew them.

While she painted, she still meditated upon Hugh. He puzzled her vision. She felt him at one moment unbearably weak ; and at another moment he seemed to flicker about her like volatile gas, restless and inconsequent. She sighed. Maybe he puzzled her, because after all she had become so puzzling to him ; and a fresh reasonableness bred slowly in her soul. She must talk to him.

Days had begun to fall against her like old leaves ; she skinned off each as it came and rubbed it thoughtfully between hands. " Brown," she said, " suits me best . . . after all ; do you remember this brown frock ? You hardly would ; it's four years old, and I never knew why I kept it "—and she

found herself wanting to bake her own bread ; she baked it each morning—and then one for Mrs Lamb—and said, " You, Mrs Lamb . . . I believe I don't like to have you working for us. It's very troublesome. But I don't s'pose *you* want to leave it suddenly. Do you ? I think we'd best go on quietly as if nothing had happened." She saw that Mrs Lamb continued to wipe a plate and to tell her, while wiping, for some reason about her childhood ; Eve felt the details being digested inside her, and listened to Mrs Lamb's several pregnancies, kneading her dough. Each loaf, as it came to the table, was not as the last or the one before that ; but in it were mystically all the loaves she had made ; and she and Hugh and even Mrs Lamb were changed mystically from day to day by this nutriment.

Children came to life out of the impenetrable surface of roads and pavements. They reached her waist ; her hand, stretching vaguely out when she paused and they gathered, would touch a pale head or a brown head and find itself among hair ; and when she ran to pick one up or gave one a flower suddenly, its eyes flung her off, even when it laughed. She made up for it by mass. It was useless. She more nearly cried over this than over anything. When they knew her—when she had spoken as an equal with mothers and fathers—they still had those analytic eyes, that seemed to pick on one point or another and examine—and go on examining till she was miserable. She needed Hugh, and tried to ask him why ; but no question would take a shape.

There were periods of enlargement and illumination. She received them and was ruminant over them ; what she had during her childhood done instinctively, came back to her as memories and grew reasonable or half-reasonable. A tea was given to the children of some unemployed—a Christmas tea from funds painfully hoarded. She came there, a red handkerchief twisted about her head ; her mood was one of momentary self-destruction, that the tea might be a success. It was a woman with dull fair hair that had told her of it—the mother of a silent adenoidal boy.

She watched the children eating in that feebly-lighted hall of dark varnish ; there was a huge fire at one end, where a man without speaking heaped fresh logs and still more logs. Hugh was there ; she felt of him as not belonging there. He was awkward with plates—he spilled half a cup of tea once.

While they played afterwards, she went and sat on a cool bench away from the fire ; and he came and sat by her. Her face was very flushed.

" You're hot ? Eh ? " he said.

She answered in a deep voice, " Yes. I am hot."

" Eve. You haven't really given me a reason yet for doing what you do. If I could understand . . ."

She said, " I have thought I wanted to explain more. Hugh, I believe I was never allowed to *live* when I was young. Do you know what it was like ? I don't see why it is, and maybe you can give me some reasons ; but all those people that kept farms and did work in the fields—they seem to have been so unnatural. No one told me . . . then. No one, I couldn't see for myself. You haven't known what it's like to be . . . knitted up right down inside agriculture. Stock-breeding. But don't you imagine from the outside, that people who move soil and ploughs and raise cattle ought to be a little *daring ?* I mean, wouldn't it go with the country work if they didn't mind a little pain and occasionally that things should be overpowering, overwhelming, uncontrollable ? Oh ! Don't you know ? But they were always so mean with me ; and so mean with themselves. Every pipe in their bodies had got frightened and all stiff and complaining and dry like catgut. I don't blame 'em ; it wasn't really their fault. What did you say ? "

" I was agreeing. I said yes."

" Yes . . Hugh, I'm beginning to understand. They spoiled the country for me. They got into debt, and mortgaged themselves and found their farms would be sold unless they borrowed more, and subsidies were given them and then suddenly taken away, and some prices went up and others went down when they had something to sell, and, oh ! I can't explain half of what went on in their minds. I'm sorry for them, but they disgust me. Hugh."

" Yes, my dear."

" *This* satisfies me. P'raps it is what you said—that I only bring my own thoughts along with me and pick out what I want. But—see—you're not to get critical of me, Hugh, because I shall start to criticize you."

" But even then, what is it satisfies you ? "

" I don't know. Every colour or light there is seems to have a rougher stronger meaning in it. That kid's blue hair-

ribbon, the way the firelight shines on the window-panes. . . . I don't know."

He did not reply. They viewed from wall to wall the cavernous dark room, rocking with feet—so many heads that twisted unceasingly. He was sullen ; he resisted her mind's control upon his world. Her mind was subjecting his world to sea-changes ; she was not accepting life as it is—but remoulding it by a corporeal logic, unassailable to reason. The change crept on ; accompanying her, he dwelt in two worlds at one moment—the world over which he pondered, and the world she carried in her soul. He could only draw down his brows and turn again and again to that same cold sorting-out of life—the same argumentation of family and class, time's unravellings and fate and self-imposed sterility. This way he fancied resolution would come ; by no other way could he allow it.

He felt that those words of the newspaper-seller were becoming substance. He felt that the conflict of souls was remorselessly taking upon itself form, drawing to itself—as through blind waters—its appropriate phrase and nutriment. It was slow ; it was unrelenting. He saw nothing of his family —heard little from them ; only Rachel's chatter and a comment here or there ; but he never doubted for a moment that the same dark forces were working in them all—and that for them, too, spirits were materializing upon the open streets.

January '26 was there ; she paid it no attention ; she felt it as a thud with vibrations beyond the reach of hearing. She drank in the loud cracked voices of children that turned a by-street into deafness, till her own intestines were resonant, and found silence the more surprising ; bottles on a vendor's stall under flare-light had hearts of interminable strength—dark purple and clouded saffron ; on the stall next but one were oranges.

She said, " I'm becoming a ruminant. It seems to me I'm getting fancies and dwelling on them. Not for food, though. Do you think we've made a slip and I'm in the family way ? " Cutting bread she cut her finger, and stood alone watching the blood run down it ; the blood ran round in its own channel, came splashing on to newspaper ; once she had been afraid of a few drops—it seemed that a few more would bleed her to death. After all, of course, many wouldn't, even many more than this. She wiped her hand. She said by the fire at mid-

night, " I *ought* to have a kid. I don't now feel mingled and linked up. . . ."

He sat forward and put his cheeks into his palms and let his cup of tea cool away. " Linked up ? "

" Part of all that flows together in life towards . . . whatever these Masses flow towards. I don't contribute. They know I don't."

" You are not a part of it," he replied.

" I say I'm not ; I want to be."

" One symbolic act," he said, " wouldn't be enough ; you would find it failed ; but failure wouldn't expunge it."

" Here—here. Remember you're speaking to the one that would have to bear it. This isn't guessing ; it's certainty. My bones feel it. And don't imagine I want it as a symbol or an offering. I want it selfishly "—and, going so far, she suddenly resented his necessity to her and threw out her hands. " You won't consider it ; you don't give me a chance. I don't want to hurry. Oh. . . . But you're so full of excuses. Suppose I *do* want it. Suppose for the pure sake of supposing. Now."

" The vile inconsequence," he said, " the transiency of everything to-day," and rubbed his hands slowly together.

" Oh. Are you dubious about your job ? It's all right, isn't it ? "

" Oh, I suppose so. Yes, pretty certain. I shall go on holding it down. But . . . I don't know."

" What ? " she said.

" Er . . . how to express it. You see, old girl, it's like this." He came round with a spasm and gulped his tea and took out a pipe. " Like this. The old man wants to give me a larger income, another hundred—another two hundred ; I couldn't exactly say. I don't want it. But I don't see how to refuse it, especially if . . . we had children."

" It's not children ; it's *a child*. But never mind about that. You haven't told me of your father's suggestion."

" I have."

" Not clearly. Not at all clearly, if you ever have. See, it's like you. You don't act ; you sit still and watch things go on and on, till they're bloated with going on ; and you can't decide and act, and that's why we have these interminable conversations."

At this time and times like this, she longed for him to do something. The need of action began to gnaw upon her.

She woke at nights thinking of it; but she formulated no vision of the act, and by day it all seemed unreal. Yet she longed—and so much so, that, when energy came bursting out of him, she was almost frightened, as though her own desire had borne the naked thing.

It wasn't very long after—one midday when she came to the City shopping, she met him as he left his office; and they sat together in a small lunch-room. Then two men were taking the chairs opposite, and he knew one of them in business; there had to be introductions. She listened only, forgetting their names—observing that the one who cooed, as he spoke, imported something that seemed to be glass-ware; and the other with the red nose and lewd eyes was partner in a concern of brass-work perhaps; she couldn't be sure. Hugh whispered to her "Poisonous types. Both." She thought so. They seemed to sprawl on the table-cloth, and now and then laughed grotesquely; and the lewd-eyed one looked at her to observe hits. She grew weary, ordered cheese and coffee, watched out of the window. A clock chimed; she wondered which church it was and turned to Hugh.

She had the sense that his face was fixed and reddening, and that he stared at his food as he ate; and she paid attention. What were they saying?

". . . That high wages can't be much good to them," pursued the cooing voice, "till they have some culture or what-name."

"Exactly," said the other, salting a potato, "but all the evidence goes to show they can't."

"Oh, quite, quite."

"These miners when they get good money—they've nothing but dog-breeding and coursing."

"And pianos."

"And pianos," said the lewd-eyed one smiling at her. "Yes. They're an illogical crowd; they've no idea of laying out the money like you and me."

"If we had it," cooed the other.

"Ah. You're right. But what I was going to say . . . to illustrate the mind of that type—in the War, you know," he explained through his mouthfuls, "we needed acetic acid for munitions . . ."

"Quite."

" And acetic acid is used for the vinegar in pickling cabbage. Now these fellows imagine they *need* pickled cabbage with their bread and cheese. See ? And when they couldn't get enough, there was almost a strike. No amount of reason or persuasion . . ."

" Is that so ? "

Hugh's face settled into a stiff rouge ; the temple next her was beating violently ; and he was paying food into himself, lump of bread—square of cheese, chewing and swallowing without attention. The lewd-eyed man took fresh breath and puffed out a drawling bellow. " I had to get my old guv'nor to sack one of our chaps the other day. I knew I'd have the blighter in time. Had my eagle eye on him since he came into the shop . . . he had that surly look. I said nothing ; I thought—' You're that sort, my boy.' You can always tell 'em, all but catch 'em half a dozen times away from their bench yarning. Then the rest began to get that same surly look about overtime. By God, it riled me. I could *not* catch the blighter out. Huh ! Huh ! . . . He made me wild. Bet he saw I was after him and then, by James, I caught him one day off his bench, and the old man wouldn't bird him. Wouldn't do it. Of course, I . . . well, to be honest, I had raked the blighter pretty straight when I snaffled him and you must have discipline. I was sick as death with the old man, and then, by God, the very next day I—stroke of luck —I picked up a letter the blighter had dropped. I *mean* to *say*. . . . Finished it. Oh, yes. The old guv'nor didn't hesitate much longer."

" H'hah ? " cooed the other. " H'hah ? Yes ? "

" Ho, absolutely damning. ' Dear Comrade ' . . . all the rest of it. Something about organizing work in your factory. That meant *my* factory, mark you. Huh-huh ! By James, I . . . "

The storm smashed out. Hugh spoke in the voice of a half-strangled man. " How did you know it was his letter ? "

" Eh ? On envelope, of course."

" You . . . you took it out of the envelope then ? "

Awkward jerk of arms ; red crawled over the face of the lewd-eyed man. " Well, to be exact, the envelope was lying *by* the letter ; I thought it might be mine. Couldn't tell, you know," he said to his friend.

" No, no. . . . Oh, quite." Silence full of weak wandering eyes ; feet shuffled.

" Damned if I believe that," said Hugh.

" What d'y'mean ? "—and every one knew what he meant, and pushed a fork or plate nervously ; and he swallowed—" Well . . . pretty obvious, isn't it, you feel manual workers needn't be decently considered."

The man with lewd eyes recovered into drawling that he never said so.

" You implied it clearly enough," said Hugh ; he had forgotten the woman. They hadn't ; they thought it all very coarse and awkward.

" You know, you don't have to deal with them, Brabant. Do give some chance to a specialist . . . H'huh ! H'huh ! Every man to his bloomin' trade. H'huh ! "

" Eh ? This is personal. I take it as a personal matter."

" Lord, I don't say there aren't *any* sound ones. Lord, I don't say that. Mean to *say* . . ."

" Well, it was a dirty trick anyway to take a letter out of the fellow's envelope. Damn dirty trick. It makes me sweat to have to sit and listen."

Their voices flowed out. " I say . . . I say." " No, no No, no. M'dear fellow." " I say. Did I suggest . . . ? " " Of course not. M'dear fellow, consider what-name." The lewd-eyed one appealed with his whole body to her, and she—she couldn't help it—burst into laughter ; and his face went all pallid in a second with red nose surprised in its centre. Outraged he was. " Men don't call me a liar twice, by God ! Half chance, kick y'bloo'bottom f'you."

" Oh, I *say*. H'sh. H'sh."

Hugh shook without pretence, lips clenching themselves round words. " If you tried it on, I'd pull your nose for you. I loathe these petty tyrannical tricks and this way of talking about decent men and women as though they were dirt. I loathe it. I don't care who knows, I loathe it. You damn well like it or lump it. God . . . h'h ! People like you make such wanton misery in the world," after which it seemed that they might as well go through the motions of withdrawal. There was nothing further to be said.

Air outside was cold ; she lifted her chin into it. As far as she was concerned, it came down like a curtain, leaving no emotion. A marionette-show discontinued till further notice

—this was what she felt ; and she had no interest in them. The surprising thing was that she had as little interest now in his family. That, too, had become a shadow-play to her. How surprising this was—and how obvious. Hugh was rather waxen. She winked at him over her shoulder, and he accompanied her as if on stilts ; he said, " That makes me feel better. Cold, like a cold shower-bath. It stiffens one up. Or is it the cold air ? " He meditated awhile. " You realize, it's so much easier . . . so *much* easier to let go on these occasions. I feel fresh now. One starts off quivering and throbbing, and it's only because one doesn't let go. Let all out. I'll remember that next time. This is fine. Isn't it revolting to see young fellows of this generation talking like that ? Most despicable types of the lot. I . . . hate them, I do." He vanished into his block of offices.

She went home and, darning socks of his, mused upon the incident. His soul then, could come out raw and furious at moments—and this frightened her ; but she darned on, losing no placidity. Only she wondered quietly where it would carry him. A brief time passed her, and he was back again, still glorified and walking on stilts. He took his tea and said, " Yes, I've made a discovery." He didn't care. The bread and butter flashed up yellow to his smiling face ; satisfaction spread itself over his skin ; he stretched his legs. " Yes, I think I've made a discovery."

" What discovery, my dear ? "

" Why, that it's so much simpler to let all one's feelings out to scum of that kind. I'm free ; my limbs are working like oil." He drove up shoulders round his ears.

She gazed at him awhile. She said, " Aren't you . . . startled at these feelings of yours ? Aren't you afraid of them ? "

He answered, " I might be, if I didn't know I was justified. Am I afraid ? It's true I lose my head, but with scum of that sort what does it matter ? A delicious sensation. . . ." He smiled ; she said nothing and brooded over him and these deep springs of energy. She found herself to be again unhappy.

It might have been then or it might have been an hour later even—one is confused about periods—that the post arrived at the door ; and he had a letter, and said, " Mother, eh ? " He looked at it standing behind her and dropped it in

her lap ; and she saw the mauve-grey paper and " Dearest Hugh . . ."

" Coming up to London then ? Did you expect this ? " She turned the page. They wished to choose new curtains and a few carpets. " Your father really doesn't know whether he wants to come or whether he doesn't. But after all he settled on coming." She said, " And the whole bunch of them ? Oh, I see." Aunt Mildred, too, would come. Their hotel ? Later, when they were decided. She arrived at the customary flow of protestations that broke into " Your affectionate Mother, Lucia Brabant."

" Well ? " he said, impatiently behind her.

" H'm. Bit of an intrusion. But what about it ? "

" What ? What ? It's just what I'm always saying. They *can't* keep away ; we're drawn up together like cows ; we wander aimlessly about with no speculation in our eyes and find ourselves drifting into the same damned old group. 'Hullo, you again . . .?' Ah, God ! it's maddening. 'Hullo, you again . . .?' we say in our feeble style and look at one another."

" You needn't see them."

" They'll come crawling after me. The old man will be winding his way round to ask me about that cash."

She argued ; he would hear nothing. He sat dumb, biting on his pipe. It was not just a family that he dreaded—but rather a family as conscious and bitter as he himself. While he was changing, they, too, had changed, and how far ? How deliberately ? One could never tell. It was, indeed, his own image that he dreaded, his own furious eyes meeting him as out of a mirror. . . .

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

After delays it was effected. By February the whole Brabant constellation came vaguely to itself and was aware of London like a bowl wherein it paused. The question was—what the devil now ? Hugh heard they had arrived ; he said, " I don't know. There seems some superconscious magnetism at work in our family ; Christmas would have been unbearable—*we*

knew it and we evaded, but it's useless, you see. Here we are a month later drifted straight into each other's arms. One grows desperate. We must sit here waiting, I suppose, eh ? "

Mr Brabant said it was the only hotel he would come to ; it was between the City and the West, discreet, but with profundities of comfort where business could be deliberated by the quiet visitant—here to-day, to-morrow in Leeds, New York or Amsterdam ; Mr Brabant knew it and knew the staff. They had a private room. At half-past two Mr Brabant sat there alone looking into the upper daylight ; he didn't know where the others were. Things and persons had begun to happen by chance. One hadn't the faintest idea, when the door opened, who would be coming in. He always turned his eyes towards them in the same way. His wife, or Miss Dallas, or a porter, it might be, or a page ; or this or that fellow who knew he was up, or Irene, again—Maurice, or. . . . He was very tired these days. Sometimes he noticed his hand tremble with a match. Was one to think—Old Age ? whatever one was to think, he was damned if he'd let them worry him. He would be at rest. He stretched out his long legs.

When the door opened, it happened this time to be Miss Dallas. She was dressed for walking ; she looked round. He said " Hullo. *You*'re going out ? "

" Out ? Yes, to see some friends of mine in Hampstead. Yes. My . . . er . . . glasses. H'm, here—on the mantelpiece, of course. I take it Lucia has gone already."

" I don't know. Has she ? *Was* she going. Was she to accompany you ? "

She studied him, buttoning her coat. " I thought she mentioned at lunch that she was going to Earl's Court—to Irene's. You signified some other engagement ; or I took you to. Didn't you ? "

" Yes. Yes, I did. Has Lucia gone ? "

" My dear Arthur, I was asking *you*."

He left his chair to hold the door open for her and smiled. " Ah, now you remind me, of course you were. Do you fancy London ? It's a queer old sea-bottom. . . . I've just been trying to decipher why the devil we've come up here."

" Oh, curtains," she said, " carpets, oilcloth . . . m'm ? "

" Lord . . . h'h. Oilcloth. Well, one makes a reason of that kind as usual. As one makes an excuse of golf or ozone when one finds oneself at the sea. Eh ? Bet you that nowadays

we could have got all the curtains and oilcloth down to Surrey to choose from. A van-load of 'em, if we'd asked. We've come up here for something, I suppose."

She waited a moment. "Well? are you asking me for the answer?"

"H'h . . . no. You don't know it."

"I trust I know the answer of my own personality. . . ."

"Oh, quite; of course, yes. I wouldn't doubt it for a moment." He lit his pipe. "What would *you* do if you had a family, Mildred?"

"My dear Arthur, I trust that even that wouldn't bring me to London without knowing my reasons." She walked into the passage and came back—"I wonder. It *might*, you know . . . I'll admit it *might*. My experience of families isn't encouraging. A family is perhaps what my friend Mrs Borodsky calls an 'eject of the irrational soul'! Ye-es."

"Here, Mildred . . ."

"Later, my dear Arthur. Don't delay me. Evening is the time for philosophy."

The clock ticked. Sparrows perched tumultuously on the window-sill and vanished. After a while Mr Brabant had gone to his room and put on coat and hat, taken umbrella. He crossed a thoroughfare, gazed into shop-windows; he skirted round the Inns, and on the cobbles about the Vegetable Market smelt all the decay and ripening that sat heavy over a world of crates and straw and cabbage-leaves and stumbling wheels. The air was dull and steady. He went into a little animal-fancier's and leaned against the counter.

For three minutes no one came; and disregarding this—since time was now negligible—Mr Brabant lit his pipe with a healthy sweep and leaned; his eyes moved to and fro like floating balls upon the sea of tumult; he drank the stench of encaged hair and feathers, straw and seed. Tumult dwindled to scratching and whining; the sea cooled, flopped in tiny waves, went up in high spurts and trills from ceiling corners. Mr Brabant was tickling a brown paw that came between its bars. His face was serious.

And human voices stirred him; they burst with footsteps from the back. "Sorry to keep you waiting, sir. Why, Mis-ter Bra-bant, and how do you find yourself, sir?"—and the other voice, "How do, Brabant. I didn't anticipate this pleasure. H'm. You remember me? . . . Grimball."

A hand was asserted upon Mr Brabant; he looked, lost his nerve and drowned.

" Colonel Grim . . ."

" And none other, and delighted to renew acquaintance."

" Are you up here, too ? " murmured Mr Brabant.

" Too ? You sound all weak . . . h'h, h'h."

" Every one seems to have converged on London. It's devilish queer. I didn't know you had any interests of this kind."

" Eh ? " said the Colonel, blowing his nose. " Well, not in the small fry, you know ; but the fact is, my boy has invested in a wolf-hound—damn great beast, Brabant, tackle an ox —and as they're hauling the lad back to the West Coast in a month or so, the creature automatically ascends to me."

" Ascends ? "

" Ascends as opposed to descends . . . h'h, h'h . . . ascends to the old cock, eh ? No, no—a joke ; just putting it bluntly. H'm. No, actually the fact is our friend here has a special food that they recommended to me, and I . . . dropped along. That's all."

The shop's owner penetrated the pause. " I don't imagine as Mr Brabant has much int'rest in the food for the large animals ? "

The Colonel said, " Oh, you ought to, you know ; you ought to. You like something with a bit of a snap in it . . . alligators, eh ? H'm."

Mr Brabant, musing soberly, replied, " I wouldn't care to have one of these super-hounds attached unto me, thank you. I don't hunt wolves. People would wonder what the devil I was frightened of ; that's how it strikes me."

" And how it strikes me, Brabant, is that people do *not* nowadays question a reasonable precaution of that kind. If you don't mind me putting it bluntly . . . h'h . . . they're not so infernally blind. I . . . I . . . really don't know," said the Colonel, shaking his head, " I . . . frankly, bit of a mystery. If I were a suspicious man—and you'll run across suspicious men, Brabant—you will, by God, you know, thick and fast, and only one in fifty have the advantage of that cool disciplined experience that *masters* suspicions, in a *steel curb* . . ." He walked down the shop and returned. His lips addressed ; the shop's owner was away probing some corner bulk ; the ceiling sang above them.

" I hate to put this point t'you," said the Colonel. Mr Brabant gazed mutely. " But after all we sound types have to stick together ; to hell with formulas . . . eh ? eh ? You take me. I suppose you'd call yourself politically a bit of a Radical ? "

" I'm damned if I should," said Mr Brabant, from four inches overhead. " Radical ? No. Though there's one or two of the Libs I've got more respect for than any of this present crew."

" You wouldn't ? "

" No."

" I see-ee-ee. You wouldn't, eh ? You understand me, Brabant . . . h'h . . . it's a natural suspicion to cross any man's mind to-day, that your boy has been pumping some piffle into you. H'h, h'h. When I come to look at it, of course not, of course not." The Colonel shook himself. " Nothing to be ashamed of, if so, Brabant ; we old 'uns naturally give our boys an ear. But *you* . . . no, no ; it needn't have crossed my mind. I'm glad."

Mr Brabant leaned forward, and his eyes ran warily from side to side ; he said, with a thirsty voice, " You'd call my son, Hugh, a Radical ? "

" Oh come, come, I . . . really. I oughtn't really to laugh ; it's no laughing matter for you, *I* can see."

" H'sh ! The fellow . . ."

" He can't hear."

Mr Brabant twitched nervously. " What is it you call my son ? "

" If you don't mind me putting it in my bluntest way—a damned Bolshevik. Mind you, a young fool, no more ; but a fool who combines fooling and education is . . ."

" What does it *mean ?* " said Mr Brabant, still whispering with quick breaths ; his mouth was opened in a fixed smile ; his eyes moved guiltily.

The Colonel stepped back. "A bit painful. H'm. Sorry . . ."

" No, no," said Mr Brabant, following him, looming above. " No. What does that mean to you all ? "—and glanced eyes at the door where carts ground past them ; and somehow he swayed with set greedy stare over the Colonel, till they were behind cages, deep in hot smell. " Tell me about it."

The Colonel, square and wary, said, " I think you know what the word implies."

" Yes, I know it's in common use ; I know it has a meaning. But don't . . . don't, don't fuss me about ; there's nobody to interfere. What does it mean to *all you ?* "

" All us ? "

" M'm . . . you, then. What does it mean to you ? That's what I said. To *you*. Let's hear before we're interrupted." The Colonel thought it wise to place hand upon his arm ; he shook it off ; his face was whitening.

" Well," said the Colonel. " H'm . . . how I use the term is for an energetic foe to peaceful and ordered society. A fosterer—whether by malice or not, by malice or not—of all the monstrous and destructive elements that every community finds resident in its bowels. An intellectual germ-carrier. If I," said the Colonel, fiercely nodding away his discomfort, " were merely speculating about this, I'd be a damned rascal, but my own boy watched him . . . your son . . . in the hot of it. Riff-raff of all descriptions, unemployables, scourings of the East End." He stopped, with straight eyes at watch, for consequence ; it was a painful duty.

Quivering gently Mr Brabant, with his cheeks softening into colour again, stuffed fresh tobacco into his pipe. He did not speak. He selected a match, gazed at it, and then replaced it. His smile was sick. " Thanks," he said. " This lonely little . . . talk has relieved me ; it has been what I wanted, I think."

" Yes, yes," said the Colonel, modestly, and found he was this time permitted to pat a coat-sleeve. " Truth is always a relief. And it has helped me, too, Brabant ; I say it profoundly, and in a . . . h'm, if you understand me . . . a religious sense. It has helped *me*, *too*."

Mr Brabant's features showed no interest, apparently he hadn't been listening. He lit his pipe at last, and when his gaze fell on the Colonel, he helplessly shook the match to and fro, till he had extinguished it. He said, " Well . . .", and coughed.

" Have you finished your business here, Brabant ? "

" No, and I must get on to it. Good-bye."

" Well," said the Colonel, with tighter lips. " Then, I suppose . . . good-bye. Eh ? " His hand was not noticed.

" Good-bye," repeated Mr Brabant.

" But not for ever," added the Colonel. " I'll drop in and see you and y'r wife. If I may. What's the hotel ? "

" It may be this evening we're leaving London."

" Oh. Oh . . . pity. Pity. Still you may not. What's the hotel ? Easy enough to call there if it's central ; " and Mr Brabant, in a dull and humble voice, lied to him that it was the " Clarence."

" The Clarence down by Victoria ? "

" Down by Victoria."

" Ah."

Mr Brabant was alone behind the cages, part of the substance of little chirps and clicks—whines and scrapings ; the reek flowed through his nostrils. He shivered with a strange guilty excitement—flushing and paling with eyeballs glassed into vacuity. Ah !—he'd felt them all hinting at him and winking at him of some dark secret about Hugh ; and *he*'d suspected in Hugh the tempers, and the incorrigible moods that could stir them to such a bitterness. But then—one couldn't admit to any of them that one was interested in tittle-tattle of that kind. If he'd admitted it, life would become unbearable—and now this old Grimstools had, almost without persuasion, given the whole show away. Ah !—he understood it all and none of them knew that he understood. Not one of them knew.

He nodded his large head, pondering the phrases. A Bolshevik — that was the term they tagged to every one nowadays when they didn't like them—one of these political labels he so loathed ; and his contempt for them flooded in beyond reason, and he creased his lips muttering " Label. Label." Bolshevik ? He refused to think about it. Because *he* was cool, human and actuarial, they called him *un original*. God help them.

His frame weakened a little, and he sighed. They were all so devilishly unfair ; and suddenly, as he thought again of his son, a feeling of shame ran over him like water. He accused himself—that here in this privy and vulgar place he had listened to an informer—and to such an informer as this prancing Colonel. It sickened him.

And yet, while he condemned himself, and mingled his son's persecution with his own, he ached intolerably. Quiet, quiet, that was what one needed. Hugh had his tempers and moods, inconsequence, surliness, almost insane fits of energy ; he couldn't stand them. Quiet. A quiet life's worth a lot. One stretches up a finger and runs it along the bars of a

canary's cage, and the nail tinkles. When old age really comes on, a calm life grows necessary. Energy is a mistake, it's a violent thing. Have a common-sense contempt but don't be violent. No, preserve us from violence.

He sought the discreet shop's owner, and then, in lapping webs of dusk, wandered back to his hotel—that lay between the City and the West—nowhere near Victoria. He took a cup of tea alone. Miss Dallas returned ; his wife returned. He said, " A very quiet afternoon. I went out for a stroll. Met nobody I know."

Later when they were dressing in their room, and Lucia remarked on her daughter, he snorted violently over a cuff-link. " What are you laughing at, Arthur ? " said she.

" Lord knows. I've got to ballast myself a bit to keep a level bottom in this bilge of a world. People get such insane notions . . ."

" Ought we to go and see Hugh ? " said she.

" No, no ; we haven't time for everything," and he muttered that Hugh was too energetic to want their placid interference in his arrangements. " Too energetic, too . . . energetic."

Next afternoon there was Miss Dallas at Hugh's flat. She rang up Eve in the midday period ; she timed herself to arrive about twenty minutes after Hugh should have returned ; and Eve was there with the tea-table and her cat. Miss Dallas filled a chair. " And Hugh ? Am I premature, then ? "

" Hugh's still washing. It seems to me he's long." She prepared her teapot sedately, humming ; conversation flew painfully to the weather and to health. *She* was quite well ? " Very." And Hugh was quite well ? " Very." One found office work dirty this weather, of course. " Probably," said Eve. " I never thought of it that way. Never." She glanced at the hot buttered toast.

Hugh came in, very neat and flushed ; he closed the door with fine precision. " Well ? " He greeted her and sat down.

" Well . . . ? " said Miss Dallas.

" The first ripple from the family tide, I suppose, Aunt Mildred ? How much will you own to us of what they're saying about me now ? Let's hear it straight away."

She sat quite still ; she was ruffled, and her blue ear-rings

began a gentle sway. "*Qui s'excuse*, my dear Hugh. . . . You are very rapid to-day, aren't you? and what, pray, have you been doing that they should *say* anything unusual about you?"

He jerked his foot. "Oh, go on. *You* know, or you guess or surmise or speculate. Let's start tea with all the veils off. Or the bread and butter will taste stringy—ah'h, h'h. What . . . what? Oh, yes, certainly." He handed her tea-cup and toast with a sweep, set it down, suddenly patted her on the shoulder; he walked to the window. "Is it raining?" He returned to the sofa.

She saw Evelyn's eyelids brooding on him, found them turned and brooding sombrely on herself. She swayed forward. "And *why* do you gaze at me like that? Is there anything amiss with my person? And you, Hugh, don't . . . daddy-long-legs round the room and round me in this fashion; you make me perspire. Your stairs have given me a giddiness already." She drank amply. "If you would both be gracious enough to tell me where I have offended. . . ."

"You haven't offended me," said Eve, raising her brows. "Why should you? We don't know each other very well and you've always been kind. Hugh!—you must make yourself definite; I wouldn't have understood except that I live with you."

He dropped himself loose in the sofa and said, "Yes. You're both right. Smooth over our surface and start on it again. Aunt Mildred, the simple truth is that action and reaction in our family have grown too violent for expression. You know. We're so worked up that we can't endure one another."

"You are," said Miss Dallas, as foot-note.

"Hey? Yes . . . h'h, h'h. You think so? Yes. And I've frankly got to hear what the talk is, and how the intrigues are going on, when they're coming, if they've issued invitations. In fact, what are the rumours, the hints, the backbiting? What's the . . . O God! you understand me." He sat clicking his fingers. "The whole alignment? In the dark I am; it's reached such a pitch that you may be coming here as a spy before we have the battalions. This sort of . . . don't get irritated. You hear them talking. Some of it at any rate."

There was deep silence. Miss Dallas masticated toast. She wiped her lips and looked at him. "H'm. Talk, as

someone says—I can't remember who—talk is merely the disordered skein spun by a myriad incomplete souls; we lack completion in ourselves, and so we find nothing but disorder. That is what you call violent action and reaction. I know I shall find no immediate harmonies on this sphere, so I don't listen. Not very much. I am almost coming to think that we talk too continuously."

"And I think so, too," said Eve, roughly. "And I was saying so the other day to Hugh—wasn't I? We talk and do nothing; we don't act. Most of us, that is. . . . *I*'m ready enough, but one can't act on empty vacuum, and when everyone else's talking, one has at last to talk too."

He began to flush; he put out his lips. "Yes, yes, darling, I agreed with you, but . . . this isn't business. Let's settle one thing at a time, even if it does mean still more talking. I get a little tired of it, too. Aunt Mildred, we can take it as granted that there isn't harmony or completeness for the matter of that; and there won't be any harmony, I imagine, till we live in a society based on some harmonious principle. You won't achieve it by hoping for it. But that's by the way; that only happens to be my opinion. At the moment I simply want to find out what particular stage of disharmony our family has now reached." He leaned forward, controlling a serious voice—a desperately serious voice; he impressed it on her. "Have you seen Irene . . . Maurice? Has mother seen them?" He got up, he couldn't help it. There was something about her quizzical immobility—that ocean of a woman; he thrust an arm round her shoulders caressing. "Don't be ruffled with me; don't be ruffled with either of us. You and I understand one another in our heart of hearts."

"H'h, do we?" she asked, looking up at him. "That is your ripened opinion?" Her face collapsed into a smile. "Well, well. You're very cosy here, my dear; the last time I came was hot summer. And now, what *is* it you want? If it's sympathy, you will find me, I fear, only an arid rock. Eschew sympathy."

"I don't expect it," he said, drinking tea on the arm of the sofa. "Here's what I ask—when is the old man coming down here? Or issuing an invitation to the hotel?"

"I can tell you in one. Neither."

"Neither?" he said.

" He remarked this morning to your mother that he hadn't time, and you hadn't time, and that he *might*—and it all sounded very atmospheric, and was buried in the newspaper —meet you up in the City and have a chop somewhere." She imitated and stretched her cup across for refilling.

Eve was watching her. " Really as you like it ? Really ? And have you seen Irene ? "

" No. Your mother has, your father hasn't. One anticipates them . . . any time. When the Shipley tide, in Hugh's imaginative phrase, will set towards our hotel is, as usual, a matter of sudden decisions. Infant and all. As to the Shipley mood, I gather it's severely political. Almost rigorously. It wore your mother down, and she had a headache after dinner, though she remarked that she could *so* well understand it, but that she *did* wish . . ."

" So he's not *coming ?* " said Hugh. They found him with puckered features ; thoughts were foul-tasting—nauseating. They had both laughed with surprise.

" Eh ? What are you laughing at ? " he said.

" I didn't know who you were talking about," said Eve. " That's all."

He wasn't listening. " H'm. What . . . what's brought him to this point of view ? I mean, I know what this ' might drop across him in the City ' involves. It's an old phrase of his. We never do *drop across* one another. Tell me "—he began, clicking fingers impatiently—" tell me in some detail what he said. Not only to-day. Yesterday or earlier still. Has he mentioned . . . er . . . money affairs ? Or politics ? Has he . . . look here, has he mentioned that incident with Margarietson and the table ? "

" No."

" He hasn't ? "

" No."

" Not in your hearing perhaps . . ."

" My dear Hugh, do you credit me with some intuitional knowledge of what he has said elsewhere ? "

He merely stared at her—swept it away with a movement of the body, just as though some alluvial deposit kept gathering about him. " Let's get down to simplicities. You know why I ask. You know I hold startling ideas . . . such as they'd call in the most exact and physical sense revolutionary . . . ideas that, if carried to a logical conclusion, mean the

end to all *their* scheme of ideas. The two sets can't go on subsisting side by side."

"I hope this is not a prelude to that abandoned rush for sympathy . . ." said Miss Dallas.

"Hey? No, it isn't. No. Why do you think so?"

"Don't be tart, my dear Hugh. Go on and don't look pained. . . . H'h, dear, h'h." She crooned with amusement.

He said, "It's not sympathy we want. I supposed you'd like to understand our points of view." He was wary.

"Please, yes," said she. "You know I'm always glad to hear anything fresh. M'm . . . I don't invariably agree, *but* most people with new notions want to expand them—not to be agreed with. H'h, dear. Ye-es?" They both saw it—the intellectual gauze that had dropped over and softened her features beyond any chance of disturbance; she drew forward the suavity of her large manner—her ripe imitations—to a level of twinkling patronage; titillation was the utmost sense she could experience. "Ye-es?" She took slow notice of the pictures and the flowers.

"Well, Aunt Mildred, in a moment one cannot expand; it takes time. You know political changes have often taken place in history. And you know they often take place in the direction of what most of us consider . . . righteous and desirable things. I mean, greater freedom, wider equality, a more generally distributed sense of humanity." He was carefully selecting. He was aware of her waiting smile—that which looms over a child repeating its lesson—he swallowed and went on, "You knew me years ago when I couldn't be called serious. But I am serious now. Take one point . . . you wouldn't expect me to support a cause that had *not* freedom and decency at the bottom of it?"

"Let us be precise at this stage," said she. "Rather—where you did not *believe* these very commendable things to be at the . . . m'm . . . bottom, as you term it."

"Quite. Quite. That's obvious. But, Aunt Mildred, I'm convinced, and I feel you must be convinced, that there are millions of people who never can have freedom or decency as Society is arranged to-day. As it *has* been arranged since history began. The . . . the . . . the machinery of things is all wrong; the system—the kind of way one man is related towards another. I'm not alone in feeling like this. There are innumerable others, and we want the change now. As

soon as possible. Even if some folk dislike the change or try to resist it. I mean," he said, wetting his lips, " it would inevitably upset some of those nearest to me. Wouldn't it ? Maurice, for example. . . . Mother."

" It very certainly would upset them . . . h'h," she replied.

" But you feel my motives are good ? "

' Of course. I haven't quite followed you yet, and there are questions I want to ask. We can discuss them at our leisure. Later on. I didn't appreciate before—indeed, I find I don't appreciate now—how fully you are involved in this . . . conspiracy."

" Conspiracy ? " he said.

" M'm ? Please don't jump at me if I use the incorrect terminology of sacramental formulæ ; I am no more than a neophyte."

" How deeply ? " said he.

" Quite so. Don't tell me if it reveals inner secrets I shouldn't hear."

He irritated his body ; Eve was listening heavily in her chair.

He said, like a bubble bursting, " Involved enough to make a split between me and the rest of my family fundamental . . . eternal, perhaps. Unless they see my point of view. You realize that ? "

" I see sufficient of your family and you," said she, " to know it might regrettably happen. Yes."

He brooded. " Only because you see my family ? It is a deeper affair than that, as you *must* be conscious. And it will involve you. You'll have to make a choice, Aunt Mildred. The more you hear of my ideas, the more you'll be convinced. I know you well enough."

She was looking into the fire. " My dear Hugh, let us retreat a pace or so. You speak of humanity. Nothing, for example, can alter the fact that I owe a human duty to your mother and father." He made a movement and she raised a hand. " My turn, lad. Let us go to the simple human relationships we have before us—first of all, at any rate. My life has found me a duty."

The front-door bell rang with punctuated violence.

He started. " Eh ? . . . eh ? "

" I don't know," said Eve. " How should I know ? Who should I have invited ? " They hung, turning their heads in

grotesque suspension. Mrs Lamb ? Out . . out, of course. It was Eve that hurried away. They heard a woman's voice.

Eve was back. " Hugh, a moment."

" Me ? Who is it ? "

" Just a moment."

" Excuse me, Aunt Mildred," and he was in the hall ; Eve retreated to the drawing-room and hovered there in the doorway. He was aware of her ruminant. A sense met him, nearest for a fraction of time to smell and taste, of something alien in his hall—something not befitting, sour, unexpected.

The woman said, " Good evening, Mr Brabant. See, it's like this ; has your wife told you ? "

Of course—it was the mother of that adenoidal boy ; tall, faded yellowish hair under her hat. It came to him like a fall of water. Of course. " Ah ! You know our address ? "

" You told my Johnnie once ; he's told me."

" Yes. Yes. I did. What's happened ? Let me hear." He knew there had been a happening ; he was on strings, staring at her. She began to speak. She told him facts, enduring them as the incidents of hunger or disease or cold ; only her lips were white, stiff and unmoistened. She moved a hand this way—that way, in little waves.

He burst out, " Arrested ? "

" That's it."

" Let me hear again the details. Slowly. What time did you say ? "

" Midday. Didn't I say ? Him and the Unemployed and like holding a meeting up outside Tanks' tobacco factory in . . . you know . . . what they call Dexter Place. M'm ? Yes . . . Dexter Place, and some of them young clerks and fellows got round ; there's a few of them students—aren't they ?—from that hospital up there . . . pity, isn't it, that such can't mind their own affairs ? M'm ? Yes, I says it is a pity. Oh, it's them I'll be sorry for if they want it. Students. Like to see 'em tackle *me*. Chivying and that, flicking, their red-white-and-blues in the face of the speaker, by accident like . . ."

" But have you seen him ? " he said.

" Tell you, he's at the police station. No one's seen him. Not yet."

" Was he the only one ? What happened ? "

She let out the narrative, as it had come to her—thin strings

of narrative through a dried mouth ; she was tall ; she moved a hand slightly this way—that way. Cheers, cursings, toes and heels trodden down ; a flag-stick across someone's face. Johnnie's ? not Johnnie's—an older man. From somewhere—she didn't know where, a fresh flag produced on the scene, the red flag. Unfurled suddenly and a howl, a rush ; then the police. Three or four all clutching at the red flag's pole and tearing for a purchase blindly on ears, throats, arms. There was a swoop, a pounce ; the red flag disappeared, seen later in a sergeant's hands as he entered the station ; the forces divided violently across to pavements, up back-streets ; Johnnie was taken. She told it fiercely ; it was the drama of life to her, but so was a child's birth or looking for a day's work—no less a drama ; she had spoken five minutes.

" Why Johnnie, alone ? "

She was uncertain. " They say he shouted something. Shouted, ' Hang on to the flag ' . . . might that be it ? M'm ? Thought you might know. 'Course I s'pose he didn't ought to have done it really. He ought t'have let the older ones give the lead like ; maybe it wasn't the best time to fight, and he shouldn't have tried to judge that. He's too young yet. I s'pose the cops thought he meant *them*. M'm ? Or, d'you think they want to make it nasty. I do . . . sometimes, straight."

It was this question of bail, and he said without a pause, of course, he could, naturally ; and then Eve came up. She had been slipping in and out of the drawing-room ; she touched him. Whispered.

" What ? " he said.

" You can't keep her outside, Hugh."

" What ? " But she was already drawing the mother in, before he could even become sensible of the contradictions. He stood short, squared himself, and laughed sadly. Why the devil not ?

After the hall the room was warm and harshly bright. There had been introductions. Eve said, " Will you have a cigarette ? "

" Thanks. Don't mind if I do. Don't get much chance." She looked at mantelpiece, bookshelf, flowers, but never saw them. The large chair sustained her at ease, but she didn't sit there. Her thoughts were a labyrinth. She accepted the flare. " Ta, my dear. . . ." Time hastened on.

It's cold travelling about to-day," said Miss Dallas.

" Yes." She wasn't listening. " See, I hardly like to come along and drag you all the way down there, Mr Brabant. If on'y I knew someone else, but then they wouldn't tell us what the bail'ld be. Wouldn't be more than five quid, would it ? M'm ? See, it isn't really that I'm worrying much ; it's all in the day's march, and he'll learn from it ; he's quick to learn from a slap, as the saying is. I never really had to give him more'n one. . . . No, thank you, dear ; I had a cup o' tea before I started."

He half absorbed it all ; he was looking at Miss Dallas. She was seated forward, a stolid axiom, saturated with profound thought ; she had stopped smiling—too busy to smile ; intense with lips pursed and soft, examining it all closely ; and the creases under her chin made it seem that her head had been suddenly jerked back—ever so slightly—the jerk at an opening gulf. And while he watched, and the narrative flowed, her eyes were drawn feebly round to catch his. She became conscious of him. A rapid suspicion passed down her face—the gulf intensified ; then her eyes faded through him into vacancy ; she wouldn't notice him. She dropped her lids very gently, turned her head again, and after a while he found they had drowsed open ; but there was placidity behind. It had all grown too concrete for her. It couldn't be thought about. Try as she would, Miss Dallas could not identify this fragment of the slums as a human soul. Soul no doubt it was from the universal standpoint—but how difficult things had suddenly become—how very difficult.

Eve was there again, touching him and whispering. He bent over. " Eh ? Yes, yes, I'll get ready now." He went into the hall and found that she had followed him ; he frowned peevishly. " What ? "

" Have you enough cash ? I can lend you three pounds."

" Yes, yes," he replied. " That'll be all right. Well, I'll take it then. Yes."

" What's the matter with you, Hugh ? "

" M'm ? " He stood silent, clenching hands in his pockets. " It's vexatious being called out like this. T'ch ! It'll eat up the whole evening." He saw her eyes sombrely upon him. " Well ? It *is* an imposition, isn't it ? "

" I thought you would be glad of the chance," she said.

" Oh, God, I. . . . Perhaps I ought to be, but this com-

plicates my problem too much. It's too much. There was no need for this to come on top of the ordeal with Aunt Mildred. I'm not ashamed of this mother, but . . . why does she come to me ? "

She said, dully, " You invited her, didn't you ? What d'you expect ? "

" Oh ! " He took out his hands and tied them together. She waited patiently. He said, " I must go then. Why should life set me such problems ? I must go ; give me a moment," and he hurried to his room. She stood till his door closed ; her lips were half-opened and dry.

In his room he washed hands. He took a brush slowly. She was there again ; he raised his eyebrows. " Yes, my dear ? "

" Aunt Mildred is going, Hugh."

" I'll come now."

Life stiffened to formulas. The formula of soap and water, the formula of brushes, the formula of leisured advance down a corridor, and then the handshake precisely given. What was Aunt Mildred saying ?

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

It was the same afternoon, earlier than Miss Dallas sat drinking tea—and the day following Mr Brabant's visit to the animal-fancier's. Mr Margarietson hurried blinking like a squat king of kings out of the tube station, and impassively across a thoroughfare. Hands were in large coat-pockets, umbrella under arm ; he circled the 'bus-streams. " Madam," he said as his arm was jerked, " I really beg your pardon," and replaced his hat and directed his eyes forward. Spots of rain fell, as he noticed, on the pavement. He mounted the hotel steps, and without fresh expression incorporated into his life Mrs Brabant, standing there uncertain. " You are right, Lady ; it is beginning to rain. Be advised and talk to me instead."

" M. ! How delightful. Is it ? Do you think it will last ? And how is my dear M. ? "

" I thank you . . ." He removed a glove and sacramental-

ized his shake. " And how are you ? I timed my arrival very dexterously, it seems. Can I . . . drop round anywhere for you ? "

She moved her head, vaguely " No. Thanks. No. I made the appointment yesterday. And anyhow you couldn't do it." She gave a croak.

" I see. What is called in technical circles a trying-on."

" M'm. But Arthur's upstairs, of *course*, M. Yes . . . go on up. What did he write you ? "

" It was Irene who told me you were here," said he.

She turned and studied him. When she spoke, her tone was lazy ; her lips frowned. " Irene ? Really ? When did you see them ? "

" I lunched with them to-day," and Mr Margarietson, taking her hand, pirouetted her with a solemn unresisted curve into a couch and seated himself by her. The lounge was decorous about them. She began to draw off her gloves. " To-day as ever was," said Mr Margarietson, crossing legs and laying a plump hand along the couch-back.

" H'm. The funny thing is that I was down there yesterday afternoon, and *can't* remember them even mentioning you, M. Isn't it curious ? So that I was *sure* Arthur must have. . . . Is that how you knew ? " She examined a hand. " No. I feel positive they didn't mention you. Have you been seeing any of the others, M. ? Have you seen Hugh ? " She drew on a glove. " M'm . . . ? "

" The answer to the mystery," said the king of kings, after silence, " is no doubt the simple one, Lady ; that, if they had remembered me, they would have mentioned it. *If* they had remembered me. You touched on Hugh. How is he ? "

She was brooding. " Haven't you seen him ? "

" Not even a glimpse."

" Oh. . . ."

She gazed awhile at two figures that passed them and retreated ; suddenly, she rose. " M., you shouldn't let me lounge here like this ; you know I mustn't. I'll see you later. Trot along upstairs now. Er . . . M. ! "

" Can I do anything ? "

" Yes, you *can*. I . . . h'h, h'h. . . . Oh, M., my dear kind M.," she said, dropping her umbrella on the couch, and making a motion to seize his arms in her fingers, " for goodness' sake, *do* tell me why my family is going mad. I feel so

angry ; and as I can't take it all and shake it in one pair of hands, I'm blessed if I won't shake *you* instead . . . h'h. You're such a bunch of infants. No, no, I don't really include you, M. ; that was a joke but. . . . They *are* so childish about their politics, M. Irene has a sort of conspiratorial way of talking, as though we ought all to be in secret societies, though I can't make out for what, except to keep each other in order, it seems ; no, it isn't quite that, of *course*, but it's to enforce decency and honesty, and prevent the working classes from being infected. It's a nice enough idea in itself, naturally, but . . . M., do you think there's any warrant for believing really that the lower classes are getting more out of hand than they were ? *I* can't see it ; I know one has to be careful, but they're always very sweet to me. It's no use asking Arthur."

He blinked all attention ; he said nothing.

" And you see, M., I think I know what is at the bottom of it ; or . . . no, when I say at the bottom, as deep as we need bother. It was *one night* especially when Hugh and Maurice and someone else "—she became close and labial— " got mixed up with some kind of disturbance or demonstration, and *they* believe that Hugh tried to involve them with a crowd of hooligans—I dare say they've told you—and, of course, whatever company Hugh may or may not tolerate *recently*, I feel it's rather incredible ; though marriage opens up fresh relationships that a boy has to adjust in his life. M., I must go ; don't allow me to talk on ; but I do wish you would exert some influence with Arthur and make him draw Hugh back again. The boy is being driven miserably away ; he can't bear the strain of being loyal to two sides, and he's creeping away from us. I blame myself, poor boy. We all have to make allowances."

" Undoubtedly," said Mr Margarietson. He nodded awhile. " Yes. But how shall a meek outsider put it, Lady ? That I will at least do my best to persuade friend Arthur to clarify his own mind about this affair. I imagine you'll agree with me that *that* would be a gain. I . . . don't . . . feel . . . justified in setting my powers any higher than that. I merely intrude from the outer darkness." With an inclination he submitted himself to the lift, as an impassive martyr to the cage—and disappeared waving from view.

" Aha," said Mr Brabant, folding up the newspaper.

" Aha," said Mr Margarietson, and deposited coat and hat,

and crossed his legs in the second largest chair ; so that the scene was instantaneously reorganized. Mr Margarietson might have been there five hours. He was carefully lighting his pipe.

" I didn't . . . m'm . . . realize you were up in London," said he.

" My dear chap, I'm only just beginning to realize it myself."

Mr Margarietson mused, and said, " You're not looking very fit. Your skin looks too tight for you."

" Yes ? "

" You don't mind me commenting ? "

Mr Brabant shrugged and asked, " No ? Ought one to mind ? I don't *feel* fit. I'm starting to loathe the business of luggage, and the struggle for existence in and out of taxis." He ran a finger under each eye and chafed his forehead. " I'm all for a quiet life, M. Damn it, I am."

" I'm very glad to hear it."

Mr Brabant lay back to examine him, and said, " Yes ? Why ? "

" One is always glad to find a brother. I was growing a little tired of solitude. . . . It is borne upon me that I spend a good deal of time searching—with a lantern—for men who want a quiet life, and have no objection to letting our fellow-mortals make us a present of it. My experience," he said, with sudden sternness, " is that ninety per cent. of humanity is yearning to present me with a quiet life."

" You think so ? " said Mr Brabant, drowsily.

" I do, brother. What is this rough and tumble ? These whistles, bumps and involutions all about us ? What but my fellow-mortals falling furiously over one another . . . to proffer *me* the unspeakable benefits of a quiet life ? I pause. Shall I accept it ? Graciously, I incline my head, and the transaction is complete. Provided," said Mr Margarietson, slowly, " that no young busybody insinuates harsh doubts into their minds. Brother, you are disturbed."

After two minutes, Mr Brabant ceased to work upon his fuming pipe. It was empty. He lifted his head again. " M'm ? What ? . . . Disturbed ? No, I'm not. I suppose you're right, M. You usually are when a fellow has time to meditate on what you say. I . . . ah—ah—ah." He yawned and stretched his arms gigantically. " Yes, yes. Well, what about

it ? I'm ready to accept a quiet life from them. Lead me to it," and he burst into a melancholy drawling laugh. " Lead me to it."

Mr Margarietson gravely permitted the clock to tick ; he noted the curves of the bronze candelabra, texture of the carpet, engravings upon the wall opposite ; they balanced precisely, painfully. He relit his pipe and said " Ye-es." He extinguished the match between finger and thumb. " Anything preventing you, brother ? "

" Eh ? I'd like to see them try it. No, I'm set on this, M. I can't . . . *have* these people fussing round me with their unendurable strength of nerves. I'm sick of violence ; it's not damn well necessary. That's what bites me ; it's not *necessary*. You're a fool, M., but you're not such a fool as you think you are. I agree with you. Most people do want to sweat themselves to death, and I don't see why I shouldn't have the harmless advantage of it. I don't hurt any one ; I don't think I've ever hurt a single. . . ." The telephone at Mr Margarietson's elbow deluged his voice away. " Yes," said Mr Brabant, out of dreams. " Oh, yes. Answer it, M. Yes." He sank over his pipe. Labour was performed for him.

" From the office downstairs," murmured Mr Margarietson. " Yes ? yes ? . . . Precisely," he continued with curiosity. " Yes, Mr Brabant is here. Can I do anything ? Eh ? Well, I suppose so." He turned. " I'm afraid I was hasty. Some visitor has arrived for you. I should have delayed."

" Hey ? Who is it ? Who could it be ? "

" My dear Brabant, I don't know. I'm sorry . . . I apologize . . . I took it incautiously for granted that you had a business appointment." And they waited the inevitable.

The door opened ; Mr Brabant shot upright from his chair, and his face twitched into an agony of hatred—and out again ; he laid his pipe on the table, crushing it in fingers, setting it with gross exactitude.

" *Well*," said the Colonel. " God bless me, Brabant, I really . . . h'h, h'h . . . really must state cause of complaint ; you are a queer card. If it hadn't been for . . . h'm. Beg your pardon." He looked towards Mr Margarietson, who had risen ; he advanced. " I . . . er. . . . H'm. Yes ? "

Mr Brabant murmured. The Colonel was released, dived,

winked. "How d'you do. H'h. As I was saying, if my boy hadn't happened to know your hotel, I should have gone trotting round to Victoria. Most amazing thing, Brabant. D'you realize what you said yesterday? Give you a guess. You told me," shouted the Colonel, "that you were staying at the . . . h'm . . . Clarence at Victoria. By God, I . . ." He pranced to table with hat and umbrella, pranced back again; the room jerked; he flicked his moustaches. "Does he often do this?"

"He has been known to," said Mr Margarietson, simply.

"M'm? Ah! Well, well—but all the same, all the same, my dear Brabant, though I laugh, I laugh without malice. I know . . . believe me, I know the mental pain through which you were passing in our little talk yesterday. I shall not forget that talk in a hurry. Life," said the Colonel, advancing sinuously on him, "is a strange thing, and I'm with you, Brabant. I'm *with you*. Good fellow"—and taking Mr Brabant's loose biceps he squeezed them slowly, fraternally, with deep vibration.

"What the devil are you doing to my arm?" said Mr Brabant. He tore himself suddenly away.

"Eh? Eh? Damn it, have I hurt you, Man?"

"No, you didn't; but I don't fancy it; I . . . And as regards that talk yesterday, I've changed my mind."

"H'm. I don't think I quite heard you."

"Yes, you did. I said I'd changed my mind. Absolutely. Or in essentials." He loomed stiff and juridical with bony features; and Mr Margarietson watching, eased back his chair into its corner on silent castors. The Colonel felt behind him for a seat; his eyes were straight.

"Look here, Brabant, there's one consideration that prevents me taking my leave . . ."

"I've changed my mind," repeated Mr Brabant, irritably, "I've changed my mind"—and he thrust hands into his trousers pockets.

"Eh? But you're speaking to me like a . . . commercial tout. D'you *realize* what you're saying, Man?"

"Yes, yes, I realize. Yes, yes. I'm not classing you as a tout; you're not trying to sell me anything . . . unless it's a pup. Sorry if the business manner don't tally with mess-room ideas; I can't help that. I've changed my mind; I've altered

my opinions, if you like that better. Have a . . . have a cigarette. Get caught in the rain ? "

" If I believed," said the Colonel largely,—and found no help from Mr Margarietson ; he sank back and reconsidered. " If I were to believe this was pure and calculated insolence, I should take my leave, but I can't believe it. I can't. You have me at . . . a disadvantage." He released one oblique eye into the brooding corner. " But I'll carry on as though we were alone. Have it out. I speak to you in my quality as a British gentleman ; that is not a plea I usually make ; I don't usually have to make it. Thank God. But I think, putting it bluntly, the occasion demands it. Now, sir, *your son* . . ."

" My son can take care of himself. His outlook on life is his own. What it happens to be is neither here nor there. I'm sick of being chased all over the countryside with information that ' your son Hugh thinks this,' and ' your son Hugh did that . . .' Why do you come to *me* about it ? Eh ? eh ? By God, if anyone had chased my old gov'nor with stories about me, I'd have had a thing or two to say."

The Colonel—rapping wrist and fingers imperatively on table—got in at last and volleyed. " No, no, no, no, *no* . . . Take it straight." He glared. " Don't flutter ; don't get off the mark. Answer like a man. Do you hold your son's opinions ? "

" How can I tell ? He hasn't told me them ; I may for all I know. Now then . . ."

The Colonel sank back. " Yes, it is ' now then ' . . . with a vengeance. H'm. Strange situation. H'm. But, my dear man, I cannot—literally cannot—forget that I informed you with proofs, which I could reduplicate, that your son is undoubtedly a . . ."

" *Will* you understand I've changed my mind ? " He stood swaying and gasping. " You won't have a . . . m'm . . . cigarette and talk about the rain. My view's this—that nine-tenths of the trouble in the world comes of shrieking out meaningless words and rattling tin swords over 'em ; and all this damn' subservience to a lot of useless frips and mummery that only costs the business man a hell of a sum to keep up. Bowing and scraping and . . . Lord knows what not. If you *want* to go to a place, where they use words with some pretence at exactness, try the ordinary business man when he's working . . . the fellow that has to handle the real stuff . . .

bills of exchange and currency figures. When he's down to the job that is ; not in the drawing-room. I can't answer for him there." He glanced into the corner and snorted. " But ah ! good God, what . . . what's the use of talking ? We should have had affairs settled years ago, if it wasn't for the tin-hats and the war-horses and the eternal slime and slither of those gentry down at Westminster. No sooner do we get started when one of 'em comes bobbin' up with some bilge about Honour or Diplomatic Procedure or ' I'm a British gentleman ! ' Let the Bankers handle it."

" Are you aware that *I* used that phrase ? "

" Hey ? "

" Are you aware that *I* called *myself* a British gentleman ? "

" You may or you may not ; it doesn't matter to . . ."

The Colonel was up. " Do you persist ? "

" Long as you damn' well like."

" Then good day. Good day. I'm sorry . . . I'm very sorry. Good day." He snapped at hat and umbrella and jerked himself to the door-knob ; he turned—" You need a rest, Brabant ; knew it the moment I saw you. You need a rest."

" Good afternoon," said Mr Margarietson, with courteous insulation. The door clicked like a trigger ; the footsteps faded out.

One found that it was evening ; fire's brightness grew—gleam from the windows lay upon the dark table. Mr Brabant sat cautiously into his chair as into a bath, sighed, leaned back ; and Mr Margarietson said " One's all for a quiet life " —and was amused through silence.

They became slowly shapes. Sky above the roof-tops from a stretched fish-skin decayed into a ruffle of scurfy clouds ; the room turned to a corpse. Mr Margarietson struck matches from period to period, digging at his pipe like a heavy beetle ; he took to grunting ; he felt perspiration crawling drowsily down the walls—the last perspiration off a dead body—leaving it all dry, at rest.

He said, disturbing the last dull drops, " Why did you treat him like that ? "

" H'm."

" Why *did* you treat him like that ? "

" What ? Because I'm sick of being chased by these howling fanatics. Chased . . . *I* know the breed. Next thing he'd invite himself to my home, bring his friends, horn-

pipes in the damn' drawing-room and moonlight tattoos all over the lawn. No, no, *no*. I can't . . . stand 'em bobbing up like a jack in the box. Don't *you* get this experience, M.? Am I the only poor blasted sufferer? I can't dally with a man for five minutes without him chasing me into the bosom of my family. I want a bit o' peace."

Mr Margarietson drew at his pipe. "You know, Brabant, I don't wish to deny all this; but listening to your friend I should never have thought of him as chasing *you*. He's got a quarry in view; I grant you that; but surely it was rather—whom would one say?—Hugh, might it have been? Mind you, I know nothing of the case; I can't judge. Some trait of Hugh's, some mannerism or opinion seems, as I took the position, to have got up the old boy's nose . . . eh?"

"Agh, bilge. Hugh? What does he know about Hugh? Seen him once in his life. No, no, it's *me* they're after because I'm damned if I'll conform to all their notions of custom, etiquette, knee-scraping, hand-kissing, art, religion. Oh, *you* know it as well as I do. God, him! Prances up to me yesterday and says . . . agh!"

"What did he say?" asked Mr Margarietson.

"Eh? Oh, leave it, leave it. These blighters attack one's freedom of thought in exactly the same way as they attack the business man's freedom of action. Generals, Civil Service, Police . . . they're all the same. They'd throttle out the breath of sound commercial judgment. They don't see that business is a delicate thing, sensitive and . . . sensitive . . . sensitive and delicate thing. It's *me* they get after."

"It's not," said Mr Margarietson sharply. "Have a sense of proportion. *I* heard what passed. He believes that your lad Hugh holds very unsound and dangerous views."

Mr Brabant swallowed in the darkness. He twisted his chair. "Labels. Only labels—only labels. *You* listened to him, *you* . . . listened to him. That's what I can't stomach. You're as bad as the lot of 'em; yes, you are and I might have recognised it before. You tire me. You get bloody tedious, M."

"You're swearing a deal to-day, brother."

"H'm."

There was a sour pause. Mr Brabant moved body and legs lumpishly as in a bath, coughed, took to his pipe; he lit it; he drew the bitter smoke through that clotted scum upon the

surface of his tongue and throat. Old and weary thoughts depressed him like a smell. His body felt the chair's soft yield and exuberance and apprehended it—in a strange series of skin-dreams—as so unspeakably preferable to a rush-bottom or one of those flat deals or a backless wooden bench. Quiet life he wanted. It was this. He imagined sleep; it would be whimsical to drop off now—amusing to drop off now; and as his limbs settled, all that resentment passed suddenly out of him and hung like smoke a foot away, and he stared at it in the dark.

Who was it, then, he loathed so sickly? Was it really M.? —And really that aged Grimstools? He remembered. These were men who seemed to check and censure him;—yet they were also the men of deep arm-chairs, of slow whiskies, pipes about a putting-green. They were no longer young; they were life in measured beats. He remembered it; and suave trickle of smoke through a hookah came a voice into his organism,—"Brabant."

He raised his head and sighed. "You spoke, M.?"

"Haven't we two sad and withered things been rather foolish? Are we not near breaking our necessary alliance?"

"M. . . . it's my fault."

"Don't say that, my dear fellow. I was no less hasty. Let us not apportion blame; let us say what I mean—that this doesn't make for peace."

"No."

Silence flowed back. Mr Margarietson grunted once or twice; and again he spoke wistfully. "Let me be honest. *I* felt no discomfort when that old Colonel was with us . . . no agitation at all comparable to yours." He paused and was not answered. "True, he is not of a type to which I am accustomed; but he's old . . . and matured . . . and unvexatious. So am I." He lit his pipe at leisure. "So are you."

"M'm."

Mr Brabant did not stir. He thought of M.—and of poor Grimstools. All his bones, voluptuously sensitive, began to ache suddenly with a real kinship for these men. He enlarged and drew others towards him, lolling half-asleep. He was merged in a love of old M., deeper than he had ever felt before. One must grow tolerant—sweetly, profoundly, quietly, tolerant.

" Brabant," said Mr Margarietson, " Tell me your motives. Why did you almost throw your harmless military friend out of the room ? Why did you attack me so violently ? "

" M. . . . M., do you think I'm going mad ? Oh, my dear M.,—my dear fellow." He leaned forward and chafed his temples in hands. " Don't spare me. Am I going mad, M. ? "

" I don't think so ; but you're growing inconsistent."

" Am I ? " said Mr Brabant. " I shouldn't have believed it. I should never have said so."

" One doesn't always realize it."

" Then it would be a form of madness."

" Not necessarily," replied Mr Margarietson. " That depends how far . . . one refuses to check it." In the pause Mr Margarietson had risen and stood against the fire. " I was recalling what you practically admitted to me down in Surrey. You confessed," said he, shredding tobacco, " in phrases that do not greatly matter—that Hugh was a heavy burden to you."

" Eh ? " He jerked his head up. " I never used such words. You didn't hear me . . . you didn't catch from me a breath . . ."

Mr Margarietson turned at him sharply,—" You did. Your every syllable, your every fragment of philosophy conveyed it. What do I care about precise evidence of place and word ? I don't know what you said or what you breathed ; but I'm a simple man and for the simple purposes of life you told me that young Hugh was too malignant . . . or, if not malignant, then restless and uncertain and bitter."

Mr Brabant shivered suddenly. " Did I say so, M. ? M. . . ."

" I tell you what I *felt* you said. You don't condemn my modest impressions, do you ? " He spoke rapidly through the darkness. " I trust not. Where is friendship if you do ? And I felt you to say that Hugh was better unseen ; and I felt you to say that if you gave him more money he could take his ease elsewhere than in your company ; and that a larger income might sober him."

" My God, did I say that ? I'm going mad. I knew it. Oh, my dear fellow . . . oh ! "

" Do you *think* you said it ? " insisted Mr Margarietson.

" I can't remember. I can't remember. Madness . . ." He was sitting with head deep in hands. His white hair came

forward into the fire-light. Spasms of trembling shook him —left him—shook him again. He cried out " Don't leave me alone ; I'm too solitary. That,—suppose I *did* say that, is it anything to be ashamed of ? Eh ? "

" No," replied Mr Margarietson softly.

" No ? You really think not ? Oh, God, what does it matter ? What does it matter ? . . . Oh, my dear fellow,— you're not leaving me ?—how shall I express it to you ? You can't understand what it is to feel doubt after doubt creeping in and to watch it till you're sick with apprehension . . . and in your own son such depths of spite, bitterness, conceit. I can't measure them ; my suggestions and persuasions don't even touch the surface ; he pays no attention—not the pretence of courtesy you'd give to a stranger. Not that. All I ask is peace." He shook furiously ; and when Mr Margarietson touched his shoulder, he so flung forward his body that the chair slipped and he fell upon his knees. " The agony of sons," he moaned.

" Brabant. Brabant."

" These creatures are grotesque that we breed out of us. They're grotesque—they're unshapen. They seem to us like ourselves and they speak in our voices and answer our thoughts, and all the time they have unfathomable schemes of their own . . . If I could understand him ! If I could follow his ways of reasoning !—But he goes on and goes on and some day he'll drag my chair from under me or strike me. He's got a violence in him that's like an itch ; and I can't stand it. I can't stand him near me. What does he do with himself ? Where does he go ? "

There was an interlude. He sat again, helped by Mr Margarietson, and scarcely conscious that he had ever fallen. He was panting. Mr Margarietson was panting, as in sympathy —touched him and would have spoken,—touched him. " Don't leave me yet," said Mr Brabant.

" No, No."

" Lucia will be back soon, I imagine," said Mr Brabant. " And Mildred."

" Yes."

" One has many hopes," whispered Mr Brabant and was silent. " But one grows old. That's the fact of it. I'll not see him again ; I can't endure more."

" Life," said Mr Margarietson, after a long silence, " com-

pels us sometimes to make a choice. Yes." He sighed plumply. " No doubt you know whether yours is a . . . wise one or not. Quiet seclusion is perhaps the goal of all endeavour. Humanly, I demand it for myself; humanly, I resent those who would deprive me of it."

Mr Brabant stirring, coughed. " Let's talk about it later—later." He breathed a while deeply. " I've never done harm to a man in my life."

" Exactly. Who of us has . . . knowingly ? "

" I realize that there must still be misery and destitution ; but it saddens me."

" Precisely," said Mr Margarietson. " It saddens all of us ; and for myself, while I cannot humanly reject the leisure that is offered to me, I spend time pondering on such ameliorations as are at present feasible."

" Oh, yes. Yes. We really think alike at bottom, M."

So Mrs Brabant, returning with cold hands, found them in darkness, and said, " Haven't you rung for tea ? "—and they had tea together by the fire. Mr Margarietson talked long and soothingly and was gone. He would dine with them the next evening. Mr Brabant thought they might have others. —might they not ?—but at that moment suggested no names.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Hugh's 'bus bored greasily through his world, swaying interminably. It arrived at the fractious, peevish scurry of the West. It left it all behind. He said little to the Mother, slipped in there beside him. Solemnly he endured this, waiting like a sack for the 'bus to evacuate them both on a wet pavement. He thought of his father and was troubled.

With the pavement it changed. He stood upright. Fitful rain was over and the first breath he took was damp and clung round the roof of his mouth, with the stench of wet coal from some back yard. He exhaled, as it were, a bubble that grew and grew—went on growing with himself quietly at its centre ; the 'bus ploughed away and the new motion began, sober footsteps. Down the street and round a turning together. This should be eternity.

He was still silent. He felt the mother thinking by him. He noticed her feet and her hands. He longed to take hold of her hand and know its texture; her hand was the street, the houses, her whole life from its painful birth.

She said, " Come to look at it now, it does seem a shame to have dragged you out."

" No. No."

" Oh, I can't help it; *does* seem a shame. Does really. I felt it when we were in the 'bus."

He jerked up under a lamp in the solitude; she turned naturally—grave features without emotion, waiting. She gave a shy laugh. " I . . . don't know. I s'pose you don't mind in one way. It's the money, y'know. Blast it. I don't think you'll object to me saying,—Blast it. *Blast it!* "

" Ah, yes, blast it," said he. " And more. But . . . this sense that it's a shame. Don't say that. Please don't." He stared into her eyes that were greenish-brown. " You remember I said I'd be glad."

" Yes. I know. I knew you would before I came. He'll *do* it, I says, because of Johnnie's sake and he'd blame me, I says, and so would his wife, if I didn't go. But all the same—me dragging you like this, out of your comfort and away from your friends, and 'tisn't as if you were used like we are to troubles of this kind. You're used to working on . . . delicate things like. What an artist works on or a doctor—with his brains. You want quiet for that, don't you? Seems a shame to worry you." Her tones were soft.

He suddenly opened his hands in a helpless gesticulation. " I don't suppose I can do this job well; you're right . . . none of my sort of people are down to realities. We don't know what life is. Tell me," he said and turned up his face pouting. " Tell me, you feel almost . . . motherly towards me and my queer *delicate* way of living and wandering about,—don't you? "

" Go on. I've got enough kids, thank you. Got enough to feel motherly about. You . . . well, help me, you are a one. H'h! I don't know."

He was walking with her again; this was natural. Everything had become natural. He stopped and said, " Do you mind? " and lit his pipe under a door. He said, " It's a nice evening for walking after the rain."

" Not bad," she answered. " What d'you think they'll give him ? "

" Yes. Give him ? I wonder. Hardly anything perhaps, —just a warning. Don't you be worried."

" I'm not worrying. It's all in the day's work." Under lamps he saw that her expression didn't greatly vary—studying the streets, always beside him with a tired waddle on stiffened hips, stubborn to her bones' marrow. He walked with pride.

There was an empty street, then shop-fronts and hurrying women, then a street clinking with late horses and bunched groups. Children ran from the yards like piping animals.

He liked the solitary lanes, because there he had her to himself. Yet for all its sweetness, he feared the journey's end ; and when he felt it close to them, he paused again. He wanted suddenly to go forward alone. " It might be easier," he said. " It might be simpler to have no explanations. One could act a bit with them—one could put on a decisive accent . . . yes ? "

" I was going to suggest it."

" You were ? " he said.

" Thought it would be better myself. I thought so." She drew a hand across her face and smiled. " I'll wait round the last corner for you. 'T'won't be very long."

" Yes." He fell into silence and accompanied her.

At last it came. He was going forward alone and by that time it was almost nothing—shredded dry of apprehension. He slipped pipe into pocket, straightened hat and scarf, hurried on towards the main street, commerce and the trams. He found a door with steps and a policeman.

" Ah, good evening, Constable. I just want to make an enquiry. . . ."

" Eh ? "

" Just want to make an enquiry from the Inspector—relative to a young fellow who was arrested."

" M'm." Hugh found eyes on him ; then lips were sucked and the eyes sought distance.

" Can I ? " said he.

" Yes. You can. *Down* the passage." Other words were spoken and he forgot them, thinking only—he didn't call me, Sir ; and he was inside among buff walls and dim unshaded lights. He repeated his question to another bulk that resented in his path with politeness customary. " Sir," it

said as one tosses half-consciously salt across a shoulder. "Yes, sir. In that room. Yes, in that room." He heard distant laughter; he heard feet. A hand turned the door-knob for him as though he were a child. He was in an empty room—two or three chairs and a counter—and the door was closed.

One had time to lounge and speculate amongst the buff walls, how many come in here and how often, and where the cells might be — and whether they glance at one from privy corners. He yawned. This was trivial, and it had seemed an ocean of distress. Why had it? Why had it seemed so unbearable? With his stick he patted the floor into imaginary faces. It would soon be over.

Soon it was over. A door behind the counter flicked busily; he was at the counter, leaning elbows on it. The man was bareheaded, with a twirled moustache; he lounged fingering his chin. "... a young boy," said Hugh. "Yes. One I happened to take an interest in, you know"—how he was drawling—"Foolish young fellow that got himself mixed up somehow ..." The drawl clung to him; his heart was beating. "Thought I might look in about possible bail, what?"

"Yes, sir. Well, bail's already paid on that case. Half an hour ago."

"Really? Who ...?"

"A relation, sir. Boy's uncle, I believe." He raised his eyebrows and waited, studying Hugh's hat-brim or thereabouts.

"I see. Then there's nothing to do."

"There is nothing, Sir."

"He'll come up ...?"

"To-morrow at nine, Sir. Eh? Well ... h'h ... nothing to worry about. Bound over, in my opinion ... nothing worse than that. No-o-o. No-o-o ..." He shrugged, pursed lips into smile, thumped himself suddenly upright from the counter.

There were gesticulations and phrases of farewell—the corridor and the steps—and Hugh was strolling down a wet pavement. Trams rode solemnly behind him. A bell was tolling.

And so that was all; it was matter to muse upon—that there was nothing worse, nothing more unusual than this.

He found the woman to whom ten minutes had been no more than ten minutes. He fingered out his pipe and told her. He meditated that it was only ten minutes—while the bell ceased tolling and left emptiness—and after all where had he changed or, if changed, where need it worry? No more than so many pairs of eyes. He lit his pipe and said, "Yes, indeed, I will; I'll come with you. I'd like to see him."

They arrived at the doorway of No. 21; they climbed very slowly up all the stairs and were both tired. They came in breathless and the boy was asleep on one bed in his stockings, snoring and gulping. They stood there and grinned. Hugh pushed back his hat to scratch vaguely at his forehead.

She had said, "H'm. So that's that. Now, would you fancy a . . . cup o' tea? *Would* you? Then you shall. No trouble; I wouldn't mind one m'self. And if he wakes up, he can have one too."

So it had been; and he sat by the window letting the memory of it swaddle him, and fatigue—though he had done little, crawled down all his limbs. The room was warm. She spoke half to herself and a clock ticked on a very high ill painted mantleshelf. Washing hung on lines. She talked, putting on apron and stirring her coals; beneath her voice and the high ticking, breathed the boy like a small engine—catching and losing again, with an arm flung out; a kettle added later the fresh upper chiming thrill. He listened and asked drowsily. The other children were out playing; *she* didn't want them fluffing round just now; *she*'d said, "And don't you let me find you here not till ten o'clock, mind." That uncle? *he*'d be her husband's brother and not too bad; no, not too bad a fellow; and held by his Union; where he had the money from *she* didn't know, but he'd be up again later—sure to. Father? Didn't Mr Brabant know? Yes, killed in the war; yes, he was killed in the war—yes; didn't he know? *Must* have known, surely. She took hat and coat into the dark other room. She poured his tea and sat with hands on lap.

"Ay, ay," he said. "Well . . ." He stirred, with an elbow across the torn and roughened oil-cloth. "Well, that's done. Are you glad?"

"Seems a pity to wake him."

"It does. I shouldn't wake him. Sleep is best after the day he's had."

" Easy make him another cup later on," she said.

" Yes."

He drank from the sweetened cup and wiped his lips. " Yes . . . you know, it was simple, wasn't it ? I admit now it's over I didn't like this . . . tampering with police and all the legal workings. I'll be quite honest. But you and everything about you seem to take it so calmly, so smoothly. I envy you."

He looked across at her with chin in his hand ; she took up her spoon and then laughed like a girl—" Oh, I don't know. Go on. Us ? There's no use people like *us* worrying, is there ? No one's going to help us for our worrying. Think they are ? You know they're not."

" No, they aren't. But it makes no difference. No difference . . . I feel here in this room, for example, that one *could* take life more as it comes. And struggle and death too, I suppose. They become almost a part of the clock's ticking. Don't they ? "

" You're queer, aren't you ? H'h."

" Does it matter ? " he said. " I'm very comfortable and quite happy to sit talking to you, if you'll have me. What ? Why do you laugh ? You know—do you mind me saying so ? —one doesn't expect your laugh in the middle of all the . . . struggle you have ; it's so young. It's charming."

She accepted the tribute. " Go on. Don't know which way I'm looking "—and sucked back her laughter and took up her cup. " Son of mine here, too. Well, well, it's a poor one that can't smile, as the saying is. I'd be a poor one. Here, have another cup. Come on. Would you like some bread and marge ? "

" Yes, another cup. Nothing else. How long have you been here ? "

" Eleven years," she said.

" I suppose some of your children were born here."

" Two. And one was buried from here."

" H'm." He watched the dark tea flow and milk oozing from its tin. Room melted into history—returned to him with sweet and heavy smells ; he sipped the sweetened tea that breathed up into his face. Out of silence he said, " It's a small thing to go to quod perhaps. I can face the thought. *He* hasn't changed much after all."

" Him ? I hope he has. I hope it's taught him a thing

or two. There's times for getting put away and times not."

"Times?" he said. "Yes. Times. . . . They won't let the Movement go far without putting away all they want. Do you think so?"

"Shouldn't wonder. It's their Law. But what's the odds? They can't pinch more'n a few."

"No," he said. "One assumes a time coming or several times . . . periods . . . when they'll take hold of scores. Or hundreds. There would be a huge strike, perhaps. It's bound to come, sooner or later, don't you think? And if I persist, *I* might be one. Yes . . . Curious to ponder it."

"No worse than having a kid."

"You've had . . . five?

"Five."

"And I sit talking about going to quod. One loses sense of proportion; but we're mostly mad. Changes must come, I suppose . . ." He listened; changes came. On the stairs were mounting slow feet; it was her husband's brother. Then the boy, waking, heaved up and swam through the syrup of half-dreams into consciousness. Then they sat round talking all together.

Eve walked the Chelsea Embankment by unending plane-trees stalks—a large world of subsidence within herself. It was the nearest place—instinctively chosen out—darkness, shown in lamplight, had peeled London to a wet surface, and air fell carelessly like the cold flat of a knife. It didn't belong to her body but she caught at threads of it and used them; tree-stalks passed her like the ticks of prenatal clock; the clouds were rags that night—and the water, every time she drifted to peep over, gulped under the wall. It was *her* mood, crusted in by masonry and railings.

She remembered how Hugh had gone off at last and said he would stay as long as necessary and be back any time—any time; and that freed her; but not human contagion to-night—not the breathing streets and the dispossessed. She didn't need them; no, no, she didn't need them. She carried them in her. Where they flowed, river flowed; where they exhaled, cold atmosphere rose up into dissolution. She set herself problems and answered them like louder and louder sea-bells.

Well . . . what about it? Well . . . what am I looking for? What's the demand? Oh, as for that — The demand? In her flat she had at last, without feeling hungry, dropped an egg into hot water and eaten it with brown bread and a cup of tea at the kitchen table; then dressed—and come musing along, till she found the Bridges. She pushed her hands deep into pockets and didn't stare at anyone; taxis went past like needles through texture—transient—with a shrill wet sound. As for the demand, she had that clear; it was clear now, if it hadn't been earlier. Hugh had gone out alone and good luck to him; let him work through the world —probe—investigate, whatever he did to save his own soul. Lord help him, he needed to. But *she* wanted the fattened relaxation of pregnancy, childbirth and suckling. She knew it. In the last month it had first vexed her and then consumed her; and with it had grown both a strange respect of him and his loneliness—and a strange withdrawal from him. To wait became intolerable. Her sense of his delays and his parsimony expanded to his very seed. So that she dully shrank from it. He might achieve the mere mechanism of begetting—probably he would achieve it if she compelled him—but only at the cost of these agitations, collapses into a chair and the interminable rivers of talk. She leaned ruminant across the parapet. Old voices woke again; what she wanted in this dreary life she was going to get—and here was something she had hitherto refused, and by refusal had bred, it might be, that very constriction and hopelessness that so pained. She yearned for enlargement. He now was solitary and she was solitary; and if not from him, then from whom? It didn't greatly matter. She gazed across the water, thinking calmly how simple it would be until he was fit to understand—to tell him they had made a slip and she was pregnant by mischance. Why not? But by whom? It did not greatly matter.

Someone was looking at her; and she knew she had said nothing aloud. Her lips told her so. She turned her head slowly and indolently to see.

"Yes? Yes? I thought it must be. Instinct, you know. . . . It's Evelyn Brabant."

"Well?"—and she caught lamplight aslant on a long nose and fingers wiring themselves fretfully round a hat-brim, and she said "Yes, obviously. Mr . . . Crowborough."

" That's right. Charles Crowborough." He came and leaned panting coldness beside her. " Excellent feat running across you like this. It's centuries since we met isn't it ? Are you out all alone." He hummed opera into the gurgitation below them.

" It's several months, I s'pose. Yes, I *am* wading through my philosophy alone to-night. Hugh's out on business."

" Eh ? Are you ? " He stared at her globularly. " Please don't accuse me of interrupting you ; I couldn't *bear* it."

" Oh, you're not," she said lazily—and leaning sideways examined the shape of his face and body. He was there—and as sleekly digested into her world as smoke might be or rain ; her breathing had no need to change because a certain male creature was pressed close to her. She examined him in her own time ; but he knew nothing of this ; he was running a chromatic scale along the parapet.

" I don't interrupt ? " he said. " So very gratified. I believe meeting you here to-night is one of the most enormous reliefs I've ever had. No really. It saves me from the tide. I've been working for nine hours on an advertisement for toothpaste, that I *know* they won't even *glance* at when I take it in. . . and, my dearest Evelyn Brabant, my teeth are aching from flank to flank. I do want you to accept it that by the end I didn't know whether my brush was a tooth-brush, and I'm positive I flagellated my gums with it."

She wasn't listening. " Here, you Crowborough . . . what's this I heard about you ? "

" From whom have you heard about me ? "

" From Rachel Hagen."

" Oh, Rachel . . ." said he.

" No, not Oh, Rachel," she answered " Not a bit of it. Don't interrupt me. You were in the Pantaloon when those Shipleys—those in-laws of mine—were attacking me ; and you took their side. You sneered at Rachel for being sympathetic with Bolshevism. You know you did, don't you ? Are you going to deny it ? "

" It's too bad the way my past comes up to confront me ; it's enough to *make* one sulk. Oh, dear . . . I did, you know ; I did. But, I say, that indictment of me was marvellous. I'm still shuddering at it. If you were leading like a red torch, I'd follow you anywhere. Anywhere."

" Ah, don't be silly. How can you possibly . . . ? "

" No, honestly," he said. " No it is honestly this time. I swear it. I *have* changed again ; I still feel there's something soul-contracting about Bolshevism, but a month or so with tooth-paste and its commercial mess-mates—*mess*-mates is good—has had its effect on me. I'm in a state of . . ." He ran his fingers along the parapet. " Suspension. A state of suspension. You could almost persuade me, if you tried."

" H'h. Life's too short," she said.

" No, no. Don't say it. Don't go on to lacerate me. I'm already crawling with honest admiration and I shall weep if I'm not allowed to nurse my admiration quietly for a moment. I shall—I'm in such an enfeebled condition. I'll . . . look here. I'll kneel. Is any one coming ? I kneel down at your feet in the dankness." He knelt. " Evelym Brabant, you astounding creature of the night, do try to persuade me."

" You poor son of a bitch . . ."

" Oh, don't, don't. It hurts bitterly."

" Get up," said she. " You know you like it."

" Any thing from you. But I'll get up."

He rose weakly and hung himself again over the waters. She looked at him pensively and didn't care for him ; though he was a man and had leaned close against her—and she could enfold him with a word. To this came other thoughts, slower and more organic ; she rolled them about ; she said, " S'pose I tried."

" Oh, would you ? "

" I don't know. I can't decide whether you're worth it. Anyhow here's not the place."

" What ? Come along *now* to my studio."

" Now ? " she said. " No. No, I'm not going to. I must wander back home."

" Some other night, then ? To-morrow evening ? "

She let the air work at her face for awhile, and putting out her bare hands laid them flat upon the wet granite. " H'm. Hugh will be often out at nights . . . on business. But no. No, I'm not coming to your studio alone, Crowborough."

" Oh, I say . . ."

" No. Not this time anyway. Get some others there ; only they must be really good people."

" Chelseaites ? " he said painfully.

" What's it matter ? Who do you know ? "

" Well—Lipper ? Stephenson ? "

" Lipper might do," she said drowsily. " Stephenson . . . h'm."

" Do for what ? "

" To have the honour of meeting me, of course, stupid. Lipper isn't a bad fellow. Yes, get him. Get some others. I'll come to-morrow evening. At nine."

" Will you ? Will you really ? "

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

" With torches burning red. You've come with torches burning red. You're made out of the midnight ; you are. Oh, no, let me wake first. Oh, let me . . ."

" H'sh Eve, dear."

" Why . . .? But you have torches burning red."

" H'sh Eve, dear. It's me."

She turned ; she looked. It was darkness. " That's worse. I can't see you. Which of you all is it ? "

" It's me, darling. Hugh."

" Hugh ? " Night beyond time weighed her up as in arms. He was a faint lustre in his shirt.

" Yes, only myself."

" What have I been speaking about ? Did *you* tell me something about torches ? "

" No."

" There *were* torches," she said. " I know there were. M'm. I woke up and you were lying here a moment ago and then they came with torches. . . . Hugh ! "

" I'm only undressing. I shan't be long."

" You're terribly late. My mouth is dried. I've been asleep centuries."

" Early, it is," he said. " It's to-morrow. I stayed so many hours down there that I missed almost all transport ; I've walked miles."

" Yes, yes. Yes, I see. You walked miles. Of course. The . . . the . . . the mother of the boy in prison, of course. I'm awake now. I'll get you some tea."

" No, lie down, my dear ; I'm almost through. And I had a cup at a coffee-stall."

She lay easing her mouth, clammy and hot with dreams. He was grunting at moments like a dog that turns about in the long hours. He spoke to her of the boy and of the boy's mother, again and again returning numbly to that upper room where hung the washing ; set eyes brooded over memory of a worn oil-cloth ; the mother's voice—her laughter—crawled living in his drowsy ears. He roused himeslf and dropped away his last sock and stretched his body in the bed. They were silent awhile.

She sought for simple threads. " Then the boy . . what ? . . . he's out, didn't you say, and he isn't depressed. I'm very glad of that."

" I'm glad about it."

" And you don't think he'll get much ? "

" M'm ? Get ? No, I don't think so. We shall know soon."

" Are you going down to the Court ? "

" I don't think I shall ; I don't think I can. In the evening I'm going to some show they have on—what is it ?—a lecture on Russia." He moved restlessly to one side and said, " I bought two tickets. Would you like to come ? "

" This evening of to-day ? "

" Yes," he said.

" No, I won't come, dear. You go. I won't come. Weren't you saying it's better at the moment—what were you saying —better to look for our solutions alone ? Weren't you saying so ? "

" Perhaps it is," he said, thick with weariness.

He woke again a minute later, on a church-bell's sound. " Aren't you coming then ? " said he.

" Where ? No," said she. " No. I told you it was better not."

He lay in thought. " Aunt Mildred," said he, " was disturbed by the presence of that woman—that mother. I watched her expression. She found it very difficult. Is it even so—even she ? The family struggle is too bitter for her ; she'll evade it—she'll submit."

" I'm too sleepy to follow you, but I agree."

" Do you think we gave her rather too great a shock ? "

" Why ? " said she. " They never thank you for letting 'em down lightly ; no one does."

" No. But listen—I haven't told you half yet of all we

talked about in their room to-night. Listen, that woman—she went to work first at a chocolate factory and then at a factory for making boot-polish. No, she went before that; she went before she left school, in the early mornings and the evenings—to help her mother clean offices; and she remembers her grandfather and heard how they walked from Yorkshire to London pushing three of the children in a box on wheels, and her own father ran beside it. There's much more. . . . How long have we been talking? What? I feel I shall never sleep."

He said again, "Good-night. I wish I could sleep. This darkness is as smothering as a bonfire. . . . That woman—I tell her story as though it had no reality, as though it were only an old ballad. We're over-educated; there's more reality to us in words. Oh, good night."

"Good night, my dear."

Day came and turned into a high soaked whiteness without rain. It seemed never to vary from this; and Arthur Brabant found that when one has risen in the lift from luncheon, one might be resting among cold and monotonous clouds; thin air possesses the mind and in a short time it neglects all but trivialities. Quite recklessly he said, "To-morrow is as good as any day; we've got to go home some day."

Miss Dallas by the window apart fingered over very slowly pages of a volume clothed in cream and mauve. Mrs Brabant said and shifted—"There's no reason, no reason at all. To-morrow or the next day. But we mentioned Monday."

"Did we mention Monday?" he said, sunk deep into his chair.

"Oh, I don't know. Oh, it *was* Monday. In a way I should be pleased; this is a vexatious room. They disagree with me high; I always feel London should be a warm envelope. *Not* the fire; that's satisfactory . . . M'm . . . Monday? I really can't decide. What do *you* think, Mildred?"

"Negligible . . ."

"What?" she said craning round.

"I remarked—negligible. But I have a feeling for to-morrow"—and her eyes ran on with the book held high; she turned curiously a page.

Mrs Brabant looked and said, "Why? I wonder why.

Moods one can't account for are beyond *my* experience." She made plaintive noises and flicked her cigarette. "You seem very comfortable, Arthur. H'm . . . to-morrow then. Have you done all you want to, Arthur?"

Mr Brabant, with a voice infinitely pitying answered, "Everything, my dear, and more"—and sank deeper; and Miss Dallas smoothed a page; and Mrs Brabant said, "What are you reading, Mildred? It sounds absorbing. Did you hear those footsteps down the passage? It's the third time . . . scrabbling. Like a bird. I suppose I left my book in the bedroom. But if we go to-morrow, oughtn't we to have seen Hugh?"

"Busy," said Mr Brabant. "Devilishly busy or he knew our hotel . . . didn't he? Eh? It's unnecessary. Better to have it simpler; more domestic. Let him come down to Surrey when he feels like it; come down to Surrey when he wants."

"*I* don't know. One imagines he'll imagine. . . . Did you say M. was coming to-night? If he is, oughtn't we to make a party? *Did* you say so? When I lie back and catch sight of you two, what is it? . . . Changed places, have you? Frames of mind, I mean, and impressions I get of you. Arthur, you're crouching like a jaguar; look at your arms. . . . A reconciled jaguar, if there's such a thing. Do tell me, have you still got a headache, Mildred?"

"Pardon?"

"I'm not sure still, oughtn't we to ask Hugh? Both of them? He's drifting away so mechanically, that I feel *our* pressure perhaps. . . . You think so, Mildred? Do you think so?"

"Hugh?"

"Yes. Yes."

"Hugh?" said Miss Dallas.

"You saw them yesterday afternoon. You haven't really told us what impression they made on you. Do you consider . . .? Your headache, is it still hanging around?"

"I had no headache, my dear Lucia. The weather strained me. It's too blunt in London for an old woman."

"Hugh?" said Mrs Brabant. "Did he feel hurt? Did he want to see us?"

"No. Not in such terms as that."

" I know we should have reckoned out our time before ; we're such a drifting family. Surely you both have sometimes a sensation that we are a drifting family. . . . Mildred, you don't help me much."

Miss Dallas' eyelids quivered ; she closed the book on her finger and replied, " Forgive me, Lucia. Yes ? How can I be of any real help, dear ? I thought this was a mere interchange of trifles. Yes ? "

" Won't poor old Hugh be hurt unless we see him ? "

" I don't feel he would, dear. I say so quite judiciously. He has so many interests around him . . . just at the moment. I shouldn't worry."

" No ? "

" Really, I shouldn't ; ask him down later to his home. Later on." Mr Brabant, listening with his eyeballs twisted to her, blinked slowly—and gave a profound sigh ; he took his pipe and sucked it thoughtfully.

" You relieve me," said Mrs Brabant.

" Well, I hope so," answered Miss Dallas. " My feeling for the reason of our whole existence would vanish, I'm sure, if helpfulness vanished. I'm positive of that." She found soberly her place.

Traffic far below bubbled like an underground rivulet ; this room, still raised in thin air, seemed to breathe with a strange humility—a conscious acceptance of our human lot —placid reconciliation ; but Mr Brabant, while accepting it thankfully, felt at moments it was all a little light-headed. Though he sank deeper into his chair, yet he seemed always outside his own body. The telephone rang ; visitors were announced from below.

When they came up—Irene and Maurice—it was a breeze of various laughters along the corridor, that ended in blowing the door open ; and there they were ; and Geoffrey Grimball, rather courteously bashful, in case one intruded on this pool of relationships. Miss Dallas pursed her lips to herself— " Yes, truly, it *is* a tide "—and Mrs Brabant was saying, " A cold ? Oh, I hope it's not a bad one ; poor Paul."

" Only slight . . ."

" Oh, only slight ? but wiser, wiser."

By the fireplace Mr Brabant greeted Geoffrey Grimball last, and eased his limbs back, still shaking delicately ; and while they were crying, " To-morrow ? I thought . . ."

and " Yes, to-morrow we feel . . ." he murmured, " Your father is dining with us to-night."

" I know, sir ; I know."

" Yes," said Mr Brabant, looking mildly up beneath his brows. " Yes, he is coming. I had a telephone message left me from him at mid-day. Yes."

". . . I know he had your letter this morning."

" Yes. I'm very glad he's coming."

" Oh, he's pleased too," said Geoffrey Grimball, bending over white hair. " I think . . . very pleased. I've always felt my governor is a great sport, sir. . . . He's really an awfully fine old boy, my old Governor. He . . . h'm . . . thinks a lot of you."

" Eh ? "

" He thinks a *lot* of you," said Mr Grimball, growing husky.

" I expect he appreciates a quiet dinner with a quiet man," replied Mr Brabant, in the same intimacy. " And you ? Would you care to ? . . . to dine with us to-night ? Would *you* care ? "

Mr Grimball, relieved and slightly reddened, drew back, —slipped hands into pockets. " Oh, thanks. Thanks very much. This evening ? " The rest were listening. " Can I dine here this evening ? " said he.

They spoke. " This evening ? " " To-night ? " They were laughing nervously like birds caught in a gust ; that is, the three visitors were laughing, when one disentangled them, and the rest politely receptive. " No, you can't to-night." Mr Brabant listened to it all.

" But Irene could," said Mrs Brabant. " And Maurice." Not Maurice . . . " No ? " Not Maurice—And it was Maurice's wife who explained so ; and Maurice, Mr Brabant saw out of the corner of his eyes, sat leaning forward and clasping hands between his knees ; he smiled from side to side. " Maurice is engaged "—and they sniggered again over the room. They seemed to flap to and fro sniggering. It was only to find a cigarette, to draw up a chair. In this high chamber with pale terra-cotta walls they danced upon baseless air.

" Yes, but Maurice himself," said Miss Dallas thinly, " is not quite certain. Not *quite* certain, I think. A little pressure perhaps . . ."

" Mmm-no, no, I really have . . . I mean, I can't, Aunt

Mildred, as a matter of fact. I mean, they're absolutely right. There *is* an engagement . . . h'h."

" Most mysterious," she said.

" H'h. H'h-h'h "—and it touched off their laughter and their eyes shone.

" And Irene ? " She would stay at home if they really didn't mind, because after all Paul's cold and then other things, and she would rather be asked for a week-end soon ; and so not Irene—or Maurice—or even Mr Grimball ; and there conversation failed awhile.

One glanced out of the window at the great soaked blotting-paper one calls the sky. Mr Brabant's eyeballs moved.

Miss Dallas, jaded with the laughter, raised now a cold survey ; she brooded on Irene ; she frowned—" Somewhat excited are you not, my dear girl ? "

They were startled—they turned ; Mrs Brabant said, " No. No."

Irene hadn't heard. " What was that, Auntie ? What ? Me excited ? What do you mean ? "

Miss Dallas compromised nervously ; their eyebrows still waited for her.

" And suppose she *was* happy," said Mrs Brabant.

" Truly, yes, yes. I meant it in no critical sense whatsoever "—and she flushed. Mr Brabant watching recalled rumours about his daughter's condition ; he peered thoughtfully at her. He was obsessed on a sudden by the presence of placid continuity on and on and on. He wondered whether he would live to see its outcome—or only be reborn thereby. He drowsed voluptuously.

They were speaking. " And you won't let anything disturb you, dear," said Mrs Brabant.

" Is it likely ? Maurice will take care of me."

" Of course, m'dear, of course," said he blinking ; and Miss Dallas agreed hurriedly, " Of course, he will ; I had no thought otherwise."

Mrs Brabant's lips remained troubled. " Yes, but Mildred's quite right ; you are excited to-day, all of you. I wonder what there *is* to be excited about. I don't know why, but everyone seems incalculable to-day. I wish you could stop to dinner ; what is this mysterious event you *must* attend to ? May one know ? I don't pretend to understand. May one, Maurice ? "

" Oh . . . h'h . . . it's of no great importance, Mother, dear. I assure you. What ? "

" I don't think it's exactly unimportant," said Irene ; and Mrs Brabant replied, " No ? Well, please forget my curiosity ; please forget it " ; and Irene answered in a serious but rapid stream—" One *would* have explained to you, darling, before this—and naturally to Aunt Mildred and to . . ." She ran on quickly. " But it was all rather difficult ; we felt you made it . . . rather difficult."

" *I* did ? " said Mrs Brabant.

" Oh, darling, not deliberately, of course ; I mean—how shall I explain it ?—we thought it might give you a wrong impression. We didn't want to upset you."

" That was very kind," said Mrs Brabant, gazing at her. " I suppose it has something to do with these political activities you were talking about."

They were all suddenly replying. " It's not political." " Oh, you were mistaken." " It's not political."

" Not political ? "

" Oh, no. What do we know about politics ? "

" *Not* political ? I *see*. . . . Yes. Then no wonder I am confused."

" It is,"—said Irene, swallowing, " you understand—social. You'd call it that, Geoffrey ? "

" H'm. Yes, I think so. Social," replied Mr Grimball huskily.

" Social. Yes, it's social work," Irene began to tire of isolation and frowned. " Oh, one can state it briefly, darling ; it's simply that we've found some people . . . a group of them . . . whose ideas rather appeal to us ; and some of them are meeting to-night to discuss a few plans, to . . . investigate a little. That's all."

" Oh," said Mrs Brabant, still gazing at her. " But do tell us the ideas of your friends ; it sounds interesting."

" Well—*you* know—generally to bring the spirit of service and duty into public life. It's . . . readiness to keep things going at difficult times and . . . someone else explain. Geoffrey ! "

There were confused voices. " H'm. Yes, yes." " . . . To keep an eye sometimes on unpleasant people." " Agitators and so on." " Yes." " Attack," murmured Mr Grimball, " the best form of defence." " H'h-h'h. H'h." Mr Brabant

drank it all in ; and below his daughter's hurried speech, there were husky comments from Mr Grimball—" Quite. Skirmishing squads . . . what ? " " Keeping oneself fit . . . what ? " Maurice smiled amiably. Miss Dallas smoothed a page.

" Fitness," said Irene, " yes, indeed. It's very important, darling, and then I feel I'm fit in my own way. Some one has to look after the next generation," and she lay back.

" Not half," said Mr Grimball reverently. There was a silence.

" And why," asked Mrs Brabant meekly, " have you associated yourselves with these interesting people ? "

" Oh, darling, you must realize that in London we come to see the need of this kind of thing. It's nothing to be troubled about. I mean," said she, flicking at her skirt, " to *me* it's simply obvious."

" Then these political activities . . ."

" They're not political," and everyone so informed her.

" It doesn't matter," said Mrs Brabant. " It really doesn't matter at all. Yes. Not political, then. It wasn't what I was going to ask ; I was only saying—I suppose they have nothing to do with . . . with Hugh. M'm ? "

" Oh, what nonsense. Oh, Mother, dear, don't be so stupid. What *do* you imagine . . .? "

" Then it hasn't anything to do with him ? "

" How could it ? "—and Irene rose up and walked to the table. " Of course not. *We*'re quite capable of seeing where our duty lies without help from anyone, thank you. Why do you always take this line ? "

" Mmm—I don't think we've seen old Hugh for months," said Maurice.

" What ? No, of course, we haven't," said she blinking. " Not for months. And it isn't our fault. He's the alien, if anyone is. I . . . I'm sick of his name being brought into it."

There was no reply. Finding none, she seated herself and closed her lids. For a while they appreciated dumbly their cigarettes ; and through the stillness they were all queerly conscious of the old man, sunk deep in his chair.

He could feel they were thinking of him ; he drew pipe slowly from mouth. It was an unreal day. He didn't know why they should be thinking of him. Brushing fingers across

his forehead, he said. " M'm "—and looked towards them. " You . . . can't any of you drop in for dinner then ? "

They made no reply for a breath ; and then were saying, " No, we have business "—" They have to go out."

" Yes. It's a pity. You can't . . . put it off ? "

They were very sorry ; it was impossible.

" Yes."

He said no more ; and Geoffrey Grimball had to leave them.

The room began to flutter again ; hands fluttered—walking sticks ; in odd corners the laughter burst out, secretive and shrill ; Maurice was always smiling.

While they emptied Mr Grimball from the door, Miss Dallas had bent over Irene. " My dear . . ."

" Yes, Aunt Mildred ? "

" I do want to remove from your mind, my dear, the impression that I meant anything critical or *hurtful* in saying you were excited. *Please*."

" Oh, of course not, darling."

" Yes, my dear, yes. I quite suppose an old woman occasionally forgets consideration to her *friends* . . . and her *intimates*. Yes."

" Oh, Aunt Mildred . . ."

" But I hope I'm not too old to learn."

" Oh, Auntie, please." The eyes of both were faintly wet.

The day faded inertly into darkness that was not very cold. One at last crawled to a switch and entered symbolically upon evening—no more than that. Alone with his wife, Mr Brabant said, " To-morrow then ; and by God I'm really glad of it ; and if you're not glad now, Lucia, I'll make you glad. I'll show you how home and the country can be truly enjoyed."

She answered, " I don't know, Arthur. Yes, perhaps."

He lay silent, meditating escape ; and saw life for moments as a net,—brushed it aside with his pipe-smoke and went back into his lawn and chestnut memories. One surmise he steadily refused,—surmise whether again, at any place or time, he would meet bodily the son that had so violated his life. For years he had dreaded this son ; he knew it now—he acknowledged it ; send us repose. He meditated and the hour crept on. Hugh was entering his own flat, where the hall stood darkened. Eve opened the drawing-room door. " You, my

dear ? I thought you weren't troubling to come back before you went to your meeting. You said so ? "

He leaned quietly against the mantlepiece. " I said so. But there was an interval . . . and so I came. Yes."

" Why, my dear ? "

" To see you," he said, pondering over her. " To have commune with you, I fancy. That is why I came." His tones were unusually moulded and sedate ; he straightened himself. " To test against you some strange flexibility I have felt all day ; strange, I tell you—perplexing. Energy stores up, and I have never known it before." He gazed at her again. She was in dark brown ; and her eyes were large and her mouth had opened lazily, still from its last modulated question.

" I like you," she said.

" Yes," he said. " Yes. But can it be that so small a thing as venturing into a police-station has released so much ? Can it be ? There seems no more to fear. I am . . . perplexed ; the police-station and the voice of that mother, utterly serene. Is this how life goes ? I'm not vast enough to contain it. Or am I ? "

" Hugh," she said, " you stay with me to-night . . ."

" Come with me," he said, drifted from her words even while they were spoken. " What ? " He glanced at her and to the ceiling ; his own immobility disturbed him.

" I'll make some tea ; you'd like that ? "

" Yes . . ." he said. " What did you suggest ? Stay here ? But let me go ; I must discover myself." He puckered up his eyebrows. " You know it."

" M'm ? " said she at the door. " Yes, I know it. Yes, you're quite right. Who can tell ? "—and she went out—and came back and said hurriedly to him, straightening a cushion, " But whatever happens, you'll always remember we've absorbed something of one another, won't you ? You'll remember we've grown into one another a little—and it would hurt if we pulled apart, whatever happens."

" What is going to happen ? "

" Oh, nothing to-night. I don't suppose," she said idly. " H'h. . . . Scarcely. I don't know . . ."

When she came back, he was seated. She placed her tray and seemed to wander, till she was close to him, and touched his hair. " Hugh, where are you going to-night ? You're not going to see your father, are you ? "

" No, no, I didn't say so. What ? I didn't conceive it. . . . What ? "

" I only thought . . . I don't want you to."

" Why not then ? " he said quickly.

" Oh, because I'm afraid of you. There's too much of you this evening ; and when you start to disencumber yourself, please don't let it be with him ; please don't let it be with any of *them*. Please don't, Hugh. Remember that old Margarietson ; remember those creatures in the restaurant. They're not worth it, darling—they're not worthy of your passion."

He twisted his fingers a moment. " With my father it's not likely ; violence horrifies him—and don't I know it ? That is why he fills me with such a strange mistrust. And anyhow," he said, shifting his pose, " what is all this ? I'm *not* going after them, so why worry ? I want to love . . ."

" Love what ? " she asked immediately.

" Love the Masses," he said. " Those thousands of recipient bodies. Why not ? I think I learned it last night—or the avenue towards it."

She was silent. She touched his shoulder and then poured out the tea with slow gestures, as though she weaved it ; her eyes brooded over the lacing milk. She knew that he was right—and that he must go on alone ; and she knew that, whatever happened now, she would be going on alone, in two hours' time or less, to Crowborough's studio ; and life might have its way. She glanced at Hugh. Can one wait for another's salvation ? There is no such law of organisms.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

HUGH drank his cup of tea and went off again ; he couldn't rest there. He said at last hanging over her—" I know that by leaving now I shan't get back earlier. I *know* it, you see ; but it's hopeless. I'm drifting in on a kind of cradle existence to-night. It feels like health after disease."

In the open streets, that were dull night without difference —neither warm nor cold, he took time for meditation. He was courageous ; he thought—as in a grave's solitude—of his

father, and knew that in some way crisis was here at last. Choice must be made.

He pitied that old man and he feared him ; and pity and fear intermingling burned stale and sombre on his heart. He groaned and stirred where he sat travelling. Day after day had flickered past, since his family came to London, and there was no sign, no whisper of the old man's mood. In what a night we struggle.

Suddenly he swelled with resentment and tore this fold of thought into rags—to hell with it. Action was life. He rose to change his 'bus, glaring like a lion down the length of Piccadilly ; and, as he sprang off, saw just in front the shoulders and overcoat of Mr Margarietson. He paused, walked slowly after, lost him among the crowds ; turning a corner, he saw once again the shape of Mr Margarietson, a clean-cut sideways view, crossing the pavement from a tobacconist's. He gave it room and himself, jostling over the street with the dozens, lounged to his 'bus-stop. When he took his seat, beside him came, and bowed placidly, Mr Margarietson.

" Good evening, Hugh."

" Hullo, M. Good evening."

Mr Margarietson sat by him in the front seat, musing towards the 'bus's goal ; his eyes were those of solitude. A minute passed.

" Mm . . . is your *foot* all right now, M. ? "

" My foot, Hugh ? "

" Your . . . foot. The one I had the bad luck to injure."

" Let me see, Hugh."

Hugh felt he was flushing with the pain of it. He said, " Down home, in Surrey. I think you must remember."

" I do, Hugh, but I had ceased completely to associate you with the incident. It was a mishap of mortal fallibility. *Thank* you, it has perfectly recovered."

" I'm very glad."

In his gladness Mr Margarietson showed no interest ; he sat looking through the panes, contemplating human ends. The 'bus grew hotter ; one stamps on these graven images of men—what else can one do ? It was strange, brooded Hugh, to meet him so inevitably ; it was fantastic. So many avenues seeming to converge on one point of crisis.

" I saw you," said he, forced to speak, " in the crowd before we met."

" Yes ? "

" I lost you."

" Yes ? "

" Been busy lately, M. ? "

" Comfortably so, Hugh ; thank you." Mr Margarietson admitted a pause and then turned his head. " And you, my dear fellow ? You are, I take it, still engaged as hard as ever in ' making the green one—red ' ? "

" The green ? How d'you mean ? " He sat forward ; his breath began to snore in his gullet.

" Pardon. I thought you knew your Macbeth. Or perhaps in my ignorance I have misquoted. I understand it's your hobby to make our exceedingly verdurous proletariat . . . *one red.* Eh ? "

Hugh swallowed angrily—" They wouldn't need me. . . ."

" You interest me deeply ; I should be pleased to study your experience ; but . . . you'll excuse me. My stopping-place. Good-night, my dear Hugh "—and rising he missed his footing and with violence trod back upon Hugh's toes. He steadied himself ; he looked. " I *beg* your. . . . H'm. It's rarely that I do anything quite acccidental, very rarely. H'm. Good night, Hugh." He left the 'bus, and Hugh, weak with impotence, felt the near shadow of his father's hotel grind like a momentary wheel across his thoughts.

He bought bread and cheese from a public bar and stuffed them into his pocket against the evening. There was an hour —more than an hour ; he could loiter from shop to shop in small streets, turning quietly in his mouth the luxury of time to spare. On this night, neither hot nor cold, men and women also loitered ; when they moved, they moved with purpose, carrying jugs for beer, or thinking far beyond. It was a region almost new to him. When he stopped at shop-windows, he felt sometimes children wandering past him, as he had felt minute fish in a rock-pool round his ankles. He came under an archway, and found trees ; there was a paved walk with high railings to its left, where the sound of traffic dropped like a chant. He distinguished the vast darkness of a church, still laired there in the old sanctity of its form ; and heavy lamps—above him and further down and further still—drew twigs and branches out of the surface of night. His mood had lost all fever ; he walked listening for chimes, touching with his stick the tall iron railings.

He passed a bare-headed young man with a great-coat hanging loosely over his white sweater. They looked again at each other. It was the seller of newspapers besides the yard gates.

" Hullo," said Hugh.

" H'h. Hullo," and they found each had moved a hand forward and had hesitated ; and they shook heartily. How was their health ? Where were they going ?

Hugh searched for his ticket. The other looked at it. " Yes ? You're going to this ? No, I can't go. H'h. No, I've got a meeting of the Branch to-night."

" It'll be worth hearing ? " said Hugh.

" Yes ? "

" Worth hearing ? Something of the truth ? "

" Yes ? It'll be all right."

" I'm wasting an hour," said Hugh. " I came early." The other studied him with dark eyes ; he was a little early too. They paced along together. Hugh said, " Did you see about a case that came up this morning . . . a young unemployed boy ? "

" No ? "

" It was dismissed ; he was told by the magistrate not to make himself so ridiculous in the public street."

" Yes ? "

" You didn't hear of it ? "

" I saw something about it in the papers ; it's not in my part o' London." The bare-headed man stepped a few flags pondering, hunched in his loose coat ; he said : " Told him not to be ridiculous in public streets, eh ? H'm, I bet you that's helped to stiffen him up a peg or two. See ? Look at it now. That's the manner of turning young fellows towards revolution. He'd never forget that. Not to make himself ridiculous . . . t'ch, t'ch."

" So I felt."

" How can you *help* it . . . see ? . . . we don't have to do anything ; the other side does it all for us. We'd only have to sit still and watch 'em driving consciousness into our chaps. And our women. His mother . . . she won't forget it either. It's sure as a fate. "

" As fate," said Hugh. " Ah, as fate ; that echoes me ; I feel the vibration in my bones. As fate."

" But it *isn't* fate."

" No ? " said Hugh.

" It's the movement of forces, and that's not fate ; I'm not fate and what more am I but one of the industrial proletariat in *this* country at *this* stage . . . ? "

" What are you ? "

" Woodworker. Furnishing trade . . . h'h."

" To me," said Hugh, " it seems a fate, a shifting of actions and reactions that leads me towards an overwhelming choice."

" To you, yes. But you, y'see. . . ."

They came upon an opened gate in the railings—and stopped. There hung above it a single dull gas-light that never flickered ; a stream of the paved pathway lost itself towards the church ; and on either side of it rose to knee-height the stone coping of the graveyard.

Hugh brooded. " H'm. Very still isn't it—a gateway to the lower world. Is that a light in the church ? "

" One light. Yes. There's somebody inside."

" Suppose we sit here a moment on the stone wall ; or would the stone be cold ? "

" Ah, but I've. . . ." He drew out a crumpled newspaper and disposed it. Half-crouching, they sat beneath a yew-tree with their legs apart. Tiny relaxations of soil grew audible then, and the falling of twigs ; the woodworker sighed, dragged from behind him little fingerfuls of grass, and bit them one by one. It was a place of revelations, and here were buried three centuries of men. He chewed stalks of grass and sighed. He released his thoughts.

" Ah, *you*, y'see, feel this struggle as a Fate, because you're not truly in the struggle. When you're in the struggle as I am, you don't feel it's a Fate, but a kind of scientific necessity. See ? I *want* something and I know what I want ; I want to be able to look round one of these days and say—' This is *my* London.' Well, but you couldn't say what *you* want . . . not in concrete terms. It's inside your own brain that the struggle is going on ; and that's bound to make you feel powerless. It's so with your class."

His words dropped thin as spray on the empty pavement. The lamp was still.

" Yes. But in my class men *are* driven by Fate . . . whatever it is in yours."

" Ah, they seem driven because you yourself seem to be driven. When the strain tightens about your class, then its

manners go and its sense of fair play goes and its endurance goes. You see forces that are incomprehensible to you and terrifying, and you take one side or the other, and go blind . . . I know." He lifted his head and the tones pattered among old branches. "Yes. That's so. Y'see, in my way of thinking, a struggle—such as this—has a habit of taking all a man's fears and all his jealousies too, and his hatreds, and subjecting them to itself . . . giving them a new meaning and a new intensity."

"I think you're very wise," said Hugh.

He flushed at once. "H'h. Well, I'd be a poor bug if I didn't use my common. H'h."

"But it's true."

"Yes?"

"Yes."

In silence a cat crept among the tombstones. They sat with chins on hands; time and thought grew together as a swamp.

"You see it," said Hugh, "more clearly than I do."

"Maybe."

"Is that because you are less tortured?"

"Maybe," said the other restlessly. "Maybe."

"I think myself now," said Hugh, "a poor creature. It saddens me, because I've only one life to live; but I'm getting used to it. The irony of it is that I pass as a fair specimen of this civilization. What do you think?"

"Yes," said the woodworker.

"Oh, tell me more. I can hardly express myself; none of us can. We have fluidity and nothing more; and even then, we constantly baulk and dam ourselves. *You* seem to me to have substance in your talk."

"Ah, Christ," said the other with venom. "You think so? You think we're taught to speak? And you know it isn't so; you know our children are turned out of your schools gulping for words and, when we try to speak, *your* phrases come back and choke us. Hands—that's what we are. I've had better timber given me between my hands than your class has ever given me words between my teeth."

"Yes, but you can speak. . . ."

"Ah, I speak, but it hurts. I want a time for my children or my grandchildren when it don't hurt any longer; and when they'll have something to talk about, and fear will be withering out of the world."

Hugh made no reply. The woodworker leaned forward and his boots moved upon the grit ; around them sighed the vegetable spaces. Imagination here took on the nature of mould and gave up no comment. Hugh's eyes, falling and lifting lazily, distinguished the wording of a gravestone. He drank it and like sweet wine it shocked him. He seemed to trespass. Only a quarter of the worn stone was visible in yellow gas-light. " . . . Departed this life April 10th, 1791, and here lies in sure hope of a glorious resurrection."

He rose and walked towards it. The other looked—" Eh ? "

" This tomb. ' William Armstrong, Merchant, of the City of London ' . . . yes. ' Of the worshipful Company of Drysalters.' Drysalters ? It's very strange."

" D'you know about him ? "

" How should I ? But how peaceably he lived and died. He was seventy-three. He had scarcely heard of the French Revolution ; I don't suppose it worried him at all. Yes. I don't know who my great-grandfathers were ; and he may have been one. His skull's below here."

" H'm. What does it say ? A Glorious Resurrection ? There's no Resurrection waiting for him and the like of him . . . none. History has finished with 'em. Worshipful Company won't *mean* anything to my grandchildren—or to yours either ; and this stone they'll have dug up and built into a . . . wall maybe."

" I know it," said Hugh. " But life's sad. My . . . father for example, if he died to-night, would have upon his tomb something akin to this." He turned. " My father hates me ; he hates me in a silent organic way."

" Does he ? "

" Yes."

" Ah."

" Are you surprised ? " said Hugh.

" I suppose most fathers do hate their sons a bit. It's only natural they should. It shows a man he's getting old, when there's a young one sprouting up in the same room ; I always say so. And your politics aren't his . . . eh ? "

" Dreadful Fate," said Hugh.

" It's *not* a Fate."

" Not a Fate. Dreadful sequence then."

" They always hate worst those of their own class that turn revolutionary. You're like traitors to them. See ? "

" Traitors . . . yes," said Hugh.

They spoke no more ; and then unsubstantially, by quiet instinct of time, they were leaving the gate and pacing along the same flagged alley. They talked of casual affairs—of the evening's news ; they parted at the traffic.

He found the Hall ; it was in a by-street, well-lighted, with house-walls sheering high and smooth-commercial premises and flats. No life but where the door was flung open at the top of five stone steps. He ran up, warm with curiosity and prickling to the smell of crowds ; so excited that he could scarcely wait his turn, flicking card in hand. Along the straight stone corridor, it shuffled—the river in its full flush ; he'd come in the flush.

Through the last doors he went, and his soul spread hot to the furthest corners in ecstasy and trickled down the shining dark blood-brown walls in shining drops of metal. In rows above, the naked lights blinded with coarse fury. Talk was everywhere, and not a word audible. Scores after scores of bare heads and hats twisting and bobbing, and the stir of chairs coming up everlastingly like an underwater bubble, and talk. . . . One shape, rising, flapped out of its coat, one was groping to its seat, one was waving. Children he could see by dozens ; the gallery overhead shouted with their feet. Masses settled in ; and still they were coming. Masses settled in with a wide expanded consciousness, slowly turning to the stage, gradually receptive. Masses settled in.

He took a chair humbly near the door, and past the side of his eyes they shuffled forward up the gangway ; he looked up at faces, kept looking up, hoping there might be a friend ; he wanted to take hold of skirt or coat-tail. He put his hat beneath the seat and his stick between his legs. He felt he was in a stronghold.

On the still empty stage hung a vast sheet ; close behind him stood the magic-lantern lifted high on its table and higher still on packing-cases. He, too, settled in and became an absorbent animal, breathing regularly. He wanted to be eyes and ears. When he thought of that churchyard scene for a moment, it felt merely like a strange gulf in his mind ; stillness—grass—a tombstone, leading him to the spirit of his father ; he meditated on it and dismissed it, because in this reality of multitudinous smells and accents it could not survive. He saw with an obscure happiness that he was no

longer afraid, the masses made him strong ; and he thought of Eve, and that gave him a faint pain because he longed to tell her about it ; but there was no time to consider it. A hot arm was already round his shoulders.

He looked up. Breathing at him the vendor of medicines said, " Hullo. Here we are again, and how's yourself ? Not got the old gal with you to-night then ? "

" No, she's out elsewhere."

" Ah. Go up further ? No ? Y'know anybody here ? "

" I expect so. I'm not sure."

" Ah. Well, now . . . let's see . . . here just wait a mo'. Here, keep the next chair for me. I'll come back later. I got. . . . " He was off—pointing, demonstrating somewhere about the doorway. A thunderbox of clapping broke and eddied in waves up the hall. The stage was occupied.

Hugh sat quietly with hands on knees. He listened to the chairman ; and still they came crawling in for their places, and the chairman paused and pointed—" There's a half-row in the front here ; why don't you come forward ? " He compelled them up the hall ; " Front seats is always filled last ; that's my experience. Do you know why ? It's because the Workers have always been taught that the back benches are good enough for them, and the front chairs belong to the gentry and the nobility. But I tell you the time's coming. . . ." They laughed and applauded ; and the fat grey-haired lecturer—the gross-bodied twinkling Trades Unionist —smiled and clapped. They tiptoed along the gangway, taking their chairs on this or that side ; and breathing at last came the vendor of medicines. He turned ; his mouth moved up and down at Hugh's ear. " Not go up further ? Haven't you a ticket ? A few reserved seats further for tickets."

" Yes. I don't want to."

" A few reserved seats just to pay for hire of hall. Rest are free."

" Yes. But I don't want to."

" Very well, m'boy ; *I*'m not minding." He righted himself largely. The lights went out. The sheet was left a gleaming circle far away. The lecturer began, a smooth ripe voice from the shadows.

Hugh sat listening, his hands clasped over his stick ; his quiet breathing grew into a tiny snore. The white circle flickered—there was a sigh—he looked into a picture of the

Kremlin. Vision and hearing ceased to have any function apart from his heavy body ; he became an absorbent sponge only, cleaving to the chair. What he drank, he scarcely knew. Echoes from it would come up long after, when he was thinking of business or running for a tram ; and he would remember that he had not, at the moment of experience—this or that impression from the whole flowing tide. A vast love went out of him for the mass of men and women that stretched away. He could feel its slow stirring as though it were one bosom, one thought. Upon it his soul lay harmoniously, and swelled with more than love—with shameless gratitude—and drank from it vigour.

Was this Russia ? He did not care much ; Russia, a hot sound like a bonfire, but a cold substance ; he had nothing of what its smells and tastes and meanings might be. Flat surface it was to him. But all these were his masses, and he took to feeling, as the slides followed one another, that they were not thinking of " Russia " ; and a deep in them was stretching out its arms and calling to a deep ; and below even those deeps other deeps awakened that he could not comprehend, felt only their wakening, and beyond them still others, till seas were not and lands were not. They felt not Russia, but a yearning of their organs ; and this yearning was themselves. Towards hands that knew lever and pick and steering-gear, their own hands tingled ; towards stomachs that knew harsh and little food, their own stomachs moved and grumbled. Their bodies listened and understood and acted it all as in a dream. *They* had no need to hear of Russia ; Russia had been born with them, slumbering in their lungs and bowels.

Sometimes he started as a clapping broke out—from this corner or that—like vast drops of rain, and spread in the way rain spreads. He started awake and fed himself afresh with the voluptuousness of love ; they were his masses. He was in a stronghold and the hall became a victorious revolution. He would have died for them. They must not suffer ; and into that there came, at intervals, the phantom voice of Mr Margarieston. " Making the green one red," and cold parsimonious laughter was added " huh—huh . . . the green one red . . . huh-huh. *One red*, eh ? . . . huh-huh. Eh ? Somewhat ver-dur-ous proletariat . . . huh-huh." It crawled about his groins ; he clenched a fist and smashed it secretly into those insolent eyes.

Deep calm followed. He sat listening. The sense of intrusion still whispered at his ear, but it had shrunk to immense distances ; it crept as down a tube. Around was uninterrupted quietude. . . . Smoke clouded faintly the hall. " And there we have a parade of the Russian Cavalry through the Red Square in Moscow "—and applause like falling water, and he, too, beat his soft hands together. It died away ; the lecturer went on, the shadow of his wand waving across the picture. Then that wide exhalation and stirring of seats, as a happy audience settles into its third or fourth wind and pipes are relighted — and the lecturer coughed, tapped the floor. Security enfolded them.

After that came the utterly new thing ; across him had leaned a man hissing words, and the medicine-vendor, with eyes gleaming white—" What ? Hey ? What ? " Hugh caught the replies, that were less words than tones and sent a shudder through him.

" You sure ? "

" Sure. Bert got the idea ; so'd Charlie.'

" We . . . you better . . . I'll come out."

" Tell the Chair ? "

" No, no. Here. Go . . . go round to be near that switch, see ? You be near that switch."

Quick threads of lightning began to twist about Hugh's world and never stoppped twisting. His breath rose and rose. He turned. A mouth was at his ear with one word rolling in its gullet, and repeated it and then again. " . . . To break up the meeting. You sit. No, no." The vendor had passed him, crushing down his shoulder, and bent to him—" *We*'ll smash 'em, by Christ. You sit." Then a rent of awful stillness—the voice of the lecturer smooth and fat.

Hugh throbbed stiff and heard behind him the lantern click once more. " And this, fellow-workers, is who I don't, I hope, need to tell you at this time of . . ." Like a wind the clapping, and here a voice said, " Lenin," and there " Lenin " ; it swelled and beat into the gallery. The great features looked down on them. " Lenin. . . ." The floor was shaking now. " Lenin. . . ."

It came. From the darkness in which all faces were blurred, a sudden cat-call that stabbed his heart. Seats jerked. " Hoo-oo-oo." A voice was crying to his right. Another to his left. " Hoo-oo-oo." It was angry ; it was defiant. " Shut out

that picture. Shut it out. Shut it. . . ." Then a dozen snarling voices round the lantern itself. "Who-re you. . . . Stop it, can't you?" "We don't want that picture." "Then get out. Get out, will you. Get. . . ." All up the hall cries were released like the drawing of fierce blades; a score rose, a hundred. The tones of the lecturer, lifted from silence into a bellow of commands—unheeded because now round the lantern was a kennelful, and a chair went skidding, and again with insolent richness, "*Will* you shut off that. . . ." "Get 'im. Get hold of 'im." The great face watched down.

Hugh was up; by instinct he had groped for his hat and pushed it down on his brows. Bodies struggled, loosed, came with a rush past him. "Here. Put on th'light." A yell of pain—a crash against the table. "Put on that *light*." Uproar like a tide. Shadows vanished—flickered away; the veil left blinking eyes, and he saw in a whirl faces that shrank and faces that surged forward, the rising of sticks. He flung himself.

He saw the lantern topple and the operator, with his arms round it, half leaped, half fell; the battle swirled suddenly in a mad rush round and round the table and the chairs—paused—then round and round again. He was in it, his spare arm about a throat, and his knee jabbing insanely at buttocks clothed with riding-breeches. He knew that he was spitting into words, but what . . .? He drove his prey forward; one bruise fell upon his shins and then another; and before he knew, the tide from down the hall had caught them all in its supreme exasperation; and the turmoil balanced for a clutching moment, lost hold, went over towards the doorway. He met the table and his prey had gone. Jammed against the table he hung sick with agony, and saw a dozen incidents—a huge figure with a red rosette that jumped from chair to chair, and seizing a stick in mid-air snatched and broke it—women's faces stiff with fury—and flung from the doorway, as he struggled free of the table, features that he knew. It was Geoffrey Grimball.

"Let me free. Let me free." Was he shrieking it? Was he thinking it? Were there bodies between him and *that*, or only bones and earth? He tore at them. . . . It was the insolence; yes, it was the insolence of it; that this Grimball who had hanged the wretched negroes—who had dared to kiss his woman, should now come coldly grinning, wantonly intrusive. "Oh! Oh!" He lowed as in a nightmare. "Oh!

Oh ! " He struggled roaring. That *this* creature of the high caste should break into *his* dream, *his* world, *his* Masses.

They gripped him suddenly by the arms. With his threshing—with those clothes he wore and the stick he carried, they thought him an enemy and he cried, " No, no, I'm one of you ; " and a voice thickened with sweat, turned and helped him. " No, no. Let him go. That's Mr Brabant . . . he's on our side,"—but who it was he never comprehended. The jam gave way ; at the door he was, in the corridor, gasping with the hope that it might not be too late. The corridor was full of pants and chatterings. Faces met him. He thrust by one with a red ribbon and a red cut across the forehead and a handkerchief stained red ; he felt the open air.

And at the porch, as he wriggled by the last resentful bodies, he could hear their monotonous voices and they maddened him—talking of it while still outside the anger went up. . . . " Must been twenty of 'em." " Oh, there *must*." Tongues were clicking, coughs and heavy breath. " Police'll be here soon," and " Ah, but listen to me—what my opinion is these young men they're . . .", and " You get out," I says ; and he says—" Take y'r hands off, you bloody swine." He says—" You bloody swine "—to *me*. He says—" You bloody red. . . ." Hugh was almost weeping.—" Ah, God ! Won't they learn, won't they learn ? Is this a matter of course to them ? " And through elbows he thrust, and the cold night met him like fresh drunkenness. He had a vision. He saw them baying at one another across the narrow street, the intruders half-retreating, the lurching bare-headed crowd pushed back towards the hall and pushed back by their stewards—pushed again. " Come on in, lads." " Come along in." " Get in before the cops come "—and the belching shout of the medicine-vendor, " Get *back* up th'steps. Get back into th'hall. Leave it to th' stewards. . . ." Hugh took the steps almost at a leap, and wrenched his ankle sideways, and scrambled to the front. Creased faces puffed into his. " No, no. Let th' stewards do it all." *He* didn't care. The pressure on him gained and controlled. *He* didn't care. The sweating hands of stewards fell on breast and neck ; they turned him and urged him, and then—" Look out ! " . . .

Cat-calls, howls, contempt from the opposing pavement rose and rose. " Aliens . . . aliens." " Bloody cowards."

" Hoo-oo-oo." It rose and rose. " Look *out!* "—he felt his voice as from a dream, and the front fighters of both met like a snarl. His stick was lifted. Grimball—where was Grimball? His ear rang suddenly from nowhere; he struck wildly, missed. The eddy beat him a dozen staggering yards, and he saw not Grimball, but Maurice.

The blow's shock made his head an engine. He took no reckoning; he was past it. Maurice?—are they *all* here? All? Come to plague him, laugh at him, spy on his doings? Not Grimball alone, but Maurice—and somewhere the features of Irene, Margarietson, Crowborough, twenty more, a hundred more. He was at him, on him; he towered above him. A voice shrill and hoarse behind him—" Come *back* " —that had no meaning but its sound. He saw the gleaming glasses, the form that shrank away. Then struck with all his force. How quickly gone, that gape of horrified surprise, those gleaming glasses—gone into something that leaped away, crumpled and fell. Hands clutched his arms and coat, and he was swung backwards; but there it lay, and its own crowd poured about it and his about him, but not before—under the dim gas-light—he could see for moments a forehead with a growing blur; and all the street went blood-red and then, as he was thrust to the hall-steps, turned as cold and grey as death.

" The cops," said one. " The cops," said another. " Here they are." " Here's the cops." " *Get* into th'hall, can't you?" " *Get* back . . . *get* back . . . *get* back. . . ." The stumbling crowd went by him; the stewards stood. And then someone ran. Two were running; and more, how many he could not tell; and he himself was running—down the street with them—running madly, running with every limb. His head was strained to run, his stomach ran; he lost all thought in energy and speed. He turned first one corner, then a second; he wound from street to street as in a labyrinth. One sense only, that he must get away, and that mind must be drowned in body and body drowned in brick and stone and rubble. He ran like a spring uncoiling. He ran till his throat choked him with its spittle, and his heart-beats almost flung him into the roadway; and in a lonely passage, between high-boarded plots, he paused and lay against the side.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

As the body lapsed slowly, thought came crawling along the well-worn ducts ; it found place left for it. He had struck on the head his sister's husband, so insanely that the stick had leapt and stunned his palm muscles ; *he* had done so. Night crept back ; London crept back—as he knew it—in its full interlocking modernity, a web of forces and eyes and controls and condemnations. And God help him ! And his family crept back so impetuously, that he didn't care what happened to him beyond it ; it was a mad desire, and he was conscious of its madness—but he didn't care—to *find out*, just to find out what they were saying and doing about all this. And as to laws and arrests and so on, if men actually came and arrested him—and no doubt they might do so, then he would never properly find out what his family was thinking and doing ; because in between would have stepped a new element that nullified both him and them.

The thought of arrest was dreadful ; but even more dreadful was the thought that he might be arrested before he had spoken with his father. A strange conviction came to him, that his father would understand ; if once it were explained to him, he would understand. He might refuse all theory and all doctrine ; but now the naked event was out, he would understand at last. It was murder. What had been till then a murder in dreams alone, was now realized horribly upon the hard street—in the dry air of a February night. It was made flesh before him. He shrank from the fact ; and in an effort to keep all as long as possible within the world of emotions, he muttered, " Yes, I'll go ; yes, I'll find out and go."

It was murder. Yes, but not of his father—and that his living father could understand ; he could touch his father's arm, and together they might understand and beat out—though painfully—a strange brazen floor of new beginnings. It was not his father, since he loved in a way his father and pitied him—naturally he did ; and in a way it wasn't Maurice even, but a kind of marionette or dummy, the mere recipient of almighty force. It was not Maurice, but an intrusive

dummy ; and that, too, could be explained—and understood. Crisis had come. " Yes, yes," he was saying. " I'll complete it ; I'll find out. . . ."

As easily as might be, he began to walk along, repeating this kind of phrase again and again with his lips. No one took any notice of him. He was a little surprised ; the streets were all full, the pubs were lighted ; he found he was holding his breath, that his body might become a ghost till he had got through and done what must be done ; but plainly no one worried.

It became obvious to him, as problems clear in drunkenness, that he'd drop into delirium if he didn't know what his father was thinking about it ; and he must come up close to him—no matter of correspondence or go-betweens—and keep on asking till the secret was out ; too long at it already, months, indeed. He found the streets quieter, and that was surprising, but it was only the City under night. He loitered on through it from pavement to pavement. He thrust a hand into his pocket, and, tearing open the paper package, took out lumps of bread and cheese and pulped them up in his mouth. He crumpled the paper away. The taste of cheese abiding in his mouth turned the world into a sanity and himself into flesh again. He began to ponder on the hard questions—as to who was likely to have gone where ; and how much anyone of them knew ; and most important, how much damage—how much precise damage. And there was no other way but a telephone-box. He stopped and thought, and there was no other way.

In the box he choked a moment. He lounged against the wall with his fingers resting on the receiver. He asked for his number as though he paid in coins ; he felt distance open, and his mouth trembled as distance opened, and he hung there grinding a heel against his ankle, taking draughts of the mercy of distance. It wasn't Irene's voice. He said, " Is that Mrs Shipley ? "

" No, sir. This is Dr Shipley's. . . ."

" What ? " It was her maid. " Yes ? Yes ? "

" This *is* Dr Shipley's. . . ."

" Yes, yes. I hear that. Dr Shipley has . . . had a slight accident, I hear. What ? What ? "

" Yes, sir." She knew.

" A slight accident is it ? "

" Oh, I think so, sir. Madam has gone off a few minutes only . . ."

" An accident ? " said he. " What sort ? What ? Did someone come ? Did they 'phone ? M'm ? M'm ? "

" There had been a call—yes ; and later someone in a taxi for madam—yes. Someone had come in a taxi."

" I can't hear. Who ? "

" Mr Grimball," she thought.

" And where . . .? Is he in a hospital ? I can't hear you. I can't hear."

" *Hotel*, sir. It's Mrs Brabant's hotel, I think."

" Why did they take him there ? "

" I can't tell you, sir."

" Why not take him home if it's only slight ? "

" I don't know, sir." Seconds passed. He was glued there at the instrument and no question formulated itself ; thus falls our life by us steadily as snowflakes, thus falls our life. " Is there anything more, sir ? "

" No. No."

" Please, who is . . .? "

" What ? "

" Who is it enquiring, if you please ? " He rang off quite noiselessly—sheared through all distance—and looked for a long time at the palm of his hand that was shining wet. He said, " The hotel ? H'm. Why the hotel ? "—and on that one might lounge conjecturing for ever ; and he thought of Eve and said " Yes, that's another thing "—wondering what she would think about it. Slowly he cooled. She wouldn't think very much of it. It was only a slight wounding. If it was only slight, then the police would never hear of it ; indeed, few outside his family would hear of it.

So, in no more than seconds his world became a shrunken little thing. It was strange. He found himself cold and sober. He had to pause a while, drawing on all reserves of emotion that still hung about his heart ; and then he left. He had no doubts ; he knew that the moment for finality was here—and how curiously did this thought coincide with the thought of Eve, an image again floating from his mind's depths. How curiously—and, as he stepped out of the telephone-box, it was exactly a quarter to ten.

It didn't take long. There one was, advancing into the hotel ; and he came under the light smiling. He nodded and

kept smiling shyly. He said, " I fancy I'll . . . just leave my things down here. On these pegs. Yes. They will be all right. *Thank* you." One must preserve a suavity—at all costs one must preserve it. He listened modestly to the room-number he wanted. " No. No, don't trouble to ring up, if you please. I'm Mr Brabant's son." He went over to the head porter and smiled, and asked him whether a friend of Mr Brabant's had not been slightly hurt and was here with Mr Brabant. " I am Mr Brabant's son, you see." Yes, a gentleman *had*—with a slight accident to his head ; and they put their faces seriously together and he listened. Here, so far as the porter knew, here to this hotel, because they were taking him along to his home in a taxi ; and just as they reached near the hotel on the way, he was taken bad. Bad ? Sick, it might be. Oh, sickness ? He had a handkerchief to his mouth and, of course, another tied to his head ; and his wife had come. " My sister."

" Ah, yes, your sister, sir,"—and as for what else, well he couldn't say. Perhaps the gentleman would be recovered enough to go off later ; or take a room for the night. He couldn't say. Hugh trod the hush of deep green carpet. " Pardon ? " No, he was grateful for the thought, but needed no page ; no—he could find the number. He smiled at porter, smiled at pages, went up in the whispering lift.

But up here the corridor was no sick chamber ; he'd left that below ; it was silent and empty—it had many doors—it was like under-sheet thoughts at night, very near surprises. What to say when he arrived, he didn't know ; he couldn't begin to lay out a plan. He merely waited to see them, as he might wait for a dreadful image of his own mind to rise towards consciousness. He turned eyes on a door, on another door. He found the number and stood ; and down the corridor, with his arms hanging loose and pushing his feet carelessly along, came his father. He came quietly on the deep green carpet. His features were stiff and cold across his bones.

Hugh hurried to meet his father and to come close to him. The old man jerked up and retreated. " What ? Who is it you want ? "

" Father . . ."

" What ? It's impossible. You're mad, you know ; you're mad," he said stammering.

Hugh went cold in a moment; his heart seemed to be rustling. "*Mad?* Did you say—mad? Perhaps I am; but are any of us sane? For God's sake, listen. I know it's a dreadful shock; but I can explain it all piece by piece. There hasn't been time. We haven't spoken for months; I ought to have taken one of the opportunities . . ." His words dried suddenly; he knew they were not heard—he knew it.

"Everything—everything," whispered his father, staring at him. "All out of complete silence. One never expects it so soon. Even now, I can scarcely . . ."

"Father—Father, I don't understand you. This shock, do try to face it."

"And to-morrow we were to go off home. To-morrow. The very last evening."

"Oh, please be calm. Please suspend judgment a second." He groped out with his hand, feeling blindly that he must touch bones and sinews to humanize this delirium; he knew so well the touch of those thin fingers. His father drew away.

"What? What?" said Hugh. "Oh, don't evade me. You won't evade me when you see it clearly. Believe me, believe me, I can explain"—and once again he bent forward; and the old man stiffened and his eyes flickered to the door, beyond which sat his family. His reserves—he almost cried out for them—but not quite, because father and child held between then so strange an intimacy, so guilty a singleness of shape, that the instinct of years would not be broken. No woman must see them—and above all no alien male; and he himself never saw, never even surmised, why it was he glanced at that door and hurriedly away.

He went murmuring on, half to himself—"One has never conceived of such violence. It's horrible. You must be mad—and then to come here."

"I'm not mad," he cried, suddenly clenching a fist—and then grew cold at the sound of his own voice. "I'm not mad," he repeated dully. "You don't really suppose I am. This sickening affair . . . and it's more sickening for me than it can possibly be for you, with the smash and the blood and . . . It's only an accident. It seems more dreadful than it really is. Do try to understand. Surely we can get away—into some quiet corner and talk it out." Again he pressed forward, before he knew it.

The old man started fearfully. He was gazing with open eyes ; he merely answered to phrases of his imagination—never to his son's words. " Why is it ? What have I done to deserve it ? You could always come down to Surrey when you wanted to. We welcomed you, we made you comfortable—didn't we ? No, no, it's no good. I can't manage to talk now," he said with a gasp.

" What ? " Hugh was amazed. " You're not afraid of me —of *me ?* "

" Afraid of you ? What do you mean ? You're insolent, boy. Remember, who it is you're talking to." He was quivering. " I have a right to check you ; I have a control over my judgment. You cross me incessantly ; I've told you once and for all. . . . No, go *away*," he piped suddenly like a bat. " You're not to come handling me. Go away ; let me alone." He shrank two paces back. His features showed a stupor at his own outcry ; he was stiffening himself.

" Oh, you must listen ; but not here—we can't talk here. Anybody might come. Can't we go into the open air—into the lounge ? "

" I won't have you bullying me. You either ignore me or bully me ; your manner is offensive. Go away and write, if you must ; yes write . . . write, if you must. It's dreadful. Where do you find it in you ? You're killing me."

" No . . ."

" Why do you come here ? Don't you realize . . ." The old man choked. His arms hung shaking. He said something that was inaudible—made a little weak gesticulation like a wave-pattern—and, turning abruptly, hurried away. His white head was stooped forward ; he thrust his hands wildly into the pockets of his dinner-jacket. He had disappeared round the bend.

The scene was over ; the footsteps were submerged by utter silence.

Hugh ran a pace and stopped. He lifted his hands feebly. He was stiff and cold ; and through it all the same obsession held him more insanely than ever—that he must speak to the old man. The obsession became himself. It was reinforced by the very madness of that interview. He couldn't believe that it had happened thus ; it was a dream. He breathed slowly saying, " His room—where is it ? I must find him " —because he felt that by any means he must make the past

as though it had never happened. He yearned for his father. Killed him ? He yearned for his understanding and tolerance. He drew out a handkerchief and wiped his lips, and heard a door open like a cry. He turned round. This time it was his mother.

She stood in the open doorway and said, " Hugh ! " He felt himself slowly reddening. She came forward ; he heard the voices inside drop flat—a whisper or so and the tiny irritation of chairs.

" Oh, my dear—my dear, what is it all ? Oh, really, I'm glad you've come ; but, oh, my dear boy . . ."

" No, no," he said. " Never mind about that. I've just seen father. Listen a moment."

" What—here ? I didn't know."

" Didn't you hear us ? Were we so quiet about it ? " He rubbed a hand across his forehead.

" No, we didn't hear. You startled me. . . ." She came close, humming to him. " Hugh, how did it occur ? Tell me, tell me. What mistake was it ? "

" Here, can you get father out for me ? I want him *now*, you see . . . *now*. Tell him yourself that I can explain everything ; it's vital. Persuade him that I must have time . . ."

Their phrases seethed at one another ; they would have seen their answers, if it were possible ; and her lips were martyrized and she twisted her fingers. Back beyond her the door stood open.

" Yes, yes, dearest boy, I know ; oh, quickly—it won't take long to tell me. Hugh, I know it's all right, but just for the moment . . ."

" Don't be tragic, Mother. It's the last thing I can endure. All I want is the old man ; where is he ? "

" I don't know."

" Agh ! Can't you see I must have him ? Where is he likely to be ? Where's your bedroom ? Oh, yes, dear, I'll tell you later on. I don't know what he's doing ; I can't understand what impression he's got. Where *is* he ? "

" Oh, Hugh, what is it . . . what is it ? Don't go to him just now ; he's overwhelmed just now ; he's not himself. Oh, tell me what happened. Was your wife there ? Did she see you do it ? Did she hurry you on against your better judgment ? "

" My wife ? Eve ? Good God, what insane story have you heard . . .? "

" Oh, I thought, I thought . . . Oh, darling, I am your mother ; I know you're madly loyal, wonderfully loyal ; it's your character, and I promise you I won't . . ."

It was past bearing. " This is absurd. Why do you keep me talking here ? Every minute is precious." He suddenly jerked by her to the doorway.

He heard her follow. He thrust his hands into his trousers pockets and walked in with features high and smooth and a little nod ; and was silent. They all looked at him—Miss Dallas from one corner, from another Mr Margarietson, whose eyebrows never relaxed their cold amazement ; and Colonel Grimball from the fireplace, and his son leaning across the table ; all in dinner dress—all but Geoffrey Grimball, when one considered ; he was in a brown sports jacket. There seemed so few of them. Hugh glanced round again.

The room was warm. Their movements, directly he was there, became ponderous, as if to exclude time ; they answered his good-evening atmospherically—all round him and not towards him. The situation lay with Mrs Brabant ; they were outsiders—she was the mother. She must set the tone. The Colonel gazed gloomily at an etching.

" I didn't know who was here," said Hugh on the sofa's arm. " I've been talking to my father ; I didn't know if he'd come in here."

There was a pause. " No," said Mrs Brabant. " He hasn't come back, you see."

" I wanted him again. I wish somebody could tell him so. M'm ? I suppose . . . somebody could tell him so. What's the matter ? " he said, worried out of breath by silence. " I'm not asking anything strange, am I ? What ? He's quite well, isn't he ? I saw him, just now. Mother ? "

" Oh, Hugh, dear . . ."

" Yes ? Yes, what were you going to say ? I mean—*I* don't want to bring the whole world into a purely domestic matter ; I'm sorry you're all here. I couldn't know that you were. But I've got to excuse myself ; I can't wait. I . . . Anyhow, I suppose you've been discussing me quite openly."

The silence was absurd. " H'm," said the Colonel, after twisting the corner of his eyes to Mrs Brabant. " None of my business to intrude ; but, as a matter of fact, I think your

name's been hardly mentioned at all. *That* is the simple state of the case."

" I . . . I don't believe that's possible. You say so, of course ; but you must have been talking about me. You must have. It's not in human nature."

" They haven't," said his mother. " Really."

" If you'll use your imagination," said the Colonel, staring at him, " you'll see we had other arrangements to attend to. How long d'you suppose it is since the young fellow was brought here ? Not . . . not an hour. Eh ? And what about his wife ? D'you assume that *she* arrived feeling light and happy about it all ? Just use your wits . . . I suppose it was—what ?—ten minutes or so before you reached the hotel, that she went to her husband's room. The room where's he's lying. Eh ? Barely that, perhaps."

Condemnation rested here ; condemnation lay in the Colonel's very presence—in Margarietson's.

Hugh flushed a moment, and then was implacable as lead ; his senses hardened. " I see you've condemned me," he said.

Heads raised like marionettes. " What ? No, no. No . . ." They were fierce ; Mr Margarietson alone watched moodily.

" No, we haven't. . . .

Hugh jerked his shoulders about. " Good God, don't be excited. This doesn't matter. This is extraneous. Surely somebody can tell my father I want another word with him. What ? He's quite well, isn't he ? *Aunt* Mildred . . . m'm ? What's the matter ? Why do you look at me as if I were a ghost ? " They gazed at him ; it made him wild. He threw out his hands in a tearing motion. " If you don't condemn, I have a right to hear about it. Haven't I ? Let's see where we stand. I know it's a queer situation ; but it's queer for me as well as you ; and you must have been giving an impression to Father." He turned to Geoffrey Grimball—" Why did you want to follow me ? "

" Well, if you go mixing yourself up with . . ."

" Don't shout at me, damn you, Grimball. What I mix myself up in has nothing to do with you. *Or* with Irene. It's all your blasted faults. Maurice and I didn't get on too badly. That's what I'm saying. Irene and you have been working this up for a definite purpose."

Rigid under attack, Geoffrey Grimball struck a match. " . . . I shouldn't flatter myself, if I were you, Brabant. If I happened to shout, it was through sheer surprise. I beg everyone's pardon." He shrugged. " *I* didn't know you went to all these Bolshevik affairs ; and I'm dead sure poor old Maurice didn't."

" Ah, ah—but you were there. Why were you there ? What right had you ? "

" And what right had *you ?* "

" I ? I ? "—and his mother rose distracted and he lost his words, flushed again, saw Geoffrey Grimball glance at her with a face dog-like and submissive as parchment. The Colonel was anxious.

It was too long. Hugh's legs suddenly jerked of themselves. Life had gathered into a head like a hot pimple ; the room—he grew conscious—boiled, was confused, swam everywhere. They were retarding him ; they were delaying and idling.

He struggled and said, " But after all this concerns the family alone," and thought all their faces might swell and pop in the heat. He said standing up, " No more. I haven't time for more. Let me see Father. That's what I came for, nothing else. Irene has some story about me. . . . Don't listen to her stories ; you can't condemn me from them. Irene is prejudiced against me—insanely prejudiced, radically biassed . . ."

The Colonel was whispering to Mrs Brabant ; she answered —she moved. Hugh leaped forward. " I'll come with you."

" No. No, dear."

" No ? Yes. You're going to Father ? Yes ? You are ? "

" No. No, I'm not."

" What ? Where are you going then ? "

" Dear, I'm going to . . . see if Irene is all right. And Maurice. I don't think you'd better come." She blinked at him. He hesitated breathing heavily ; she was gone.

" Don't *follow*," said the Colonel, in fresh tones to which the room vibrated.

" Eh ? Why not ? " Hugh felt eyes harden in a moment.

" Because, my dear young man, she's going to see your sister. And your sister ought not to come suddenly in and find you. H'm. That's why."

" Ah, so that's what you said to Mother."

" I did."

Hugh turned helplessly, caught for a breath Mr Margarietson's gaze, still vaguely surprised—gravenly curious ; he discovered Miss Dallas. " Aunt Mildred. Here, Aunt Mildred, for the Lord's sake let's have this business through. All this talk is unprofitable ; you can see it is. *I* don't want much. I just want to find the old man for a second." He walked across. She didn't move ; he saw on the chair-arm one hand begin to quiver. He was almost sorry. " Just want him five minutes ; I know it's a strange affair, a horrible affair. I feel it's perhaps worse for you than . . . for me." He swallowed. " Come, dear. Please."

" Hugh, I . . ."

" Oh, show a little sympathy, Aunt Mildred. Don't imagine I'm not suffering."

" Hugh, I can't condone this bitterness and violence. I can't. I . . ."

" What ? But violence ? Violence ? Where does it begin ? Where does it *not* exist nowadays ? Good God, I thought you were friendly ; I thought you had kindness and understanding in you. Violence ? You sit still as though I'd caused it. What about the bitterness in Irene ? "

She struggled to quieten her hand ; she was fascinated towards his eyes and stared up into them. " You must see that Irene has some very high ideals of duty. She . . . seems to feel her position as a mother. She . . ." The voice was drying in her mouth. " She feels temperamentally the need for order and humanity."

" Yes, yes, but violence . . ." and the Colonel said, " Well, well, what about it ? D'you mean to suggest order hasn't occasionally to be enforced ? Eh ? Eh ? "

" What ? Enforced ? Oh, pah, you're evading the whole point "—and the door opened. They turned. It was Irene ; and Mrs Brabant behind said, " Darling, for *my* sake " ; but they scarcely heard her.

" Hugh . . ." Irene was saying. " You've got a damned nerve." She stopped and swallowed. Her eyes were set. Everyone seemed to have risen in a moment—everyone but Mr Margarietson. The room cooed. She felt it and brushed it away. " My *God*, you leave me breathless with it. You . . . I don't know what to say to you. You finish me. Coming here. Here. No, no, Mother . . . what ? What, dear ?

No, I'm very glad you did tell me. Hugh . . . Don't you realize what you've done, Hugh ? M'm ? You know what you've done, don't you, Hugh ? M'm ? "

He was watching her ; his breath shortened. Her mouth was curved like her mother's into a wrinkled sourness ; she kept looking from side to side in a strange surprise ; she swallowed. He said hoarsely, " Yes, I do realize. Yes, I do."

" You *do ?* You actually know you tried to . . .? "

" Darling," said her mother.

" No, no. Oh, it's impossible ; it's impossible. He *can't* be here." She twisted her handkerchief. " Hugh . . . it isn't him. Is it you ? Do you stand there—quite still, and know you tried to . . .? "

He was conscious of his face ; he felt it strain and prickle. " Irene . . ." He moved his hands. " These things happen. We've got to see it. They happen."

" What do you mean ? I don't understand what you mean ? "

There were stirrings about him ; the room stiffened ; he wondered why. His words ploughed on—" It's got to happen because we differ so deeply ; because the awful pressure of life draws us into opposite camps."

" What's all this ? Don't you see you're driving me . . . I shall, I can't help it . . . oh ! " They stirred again. " You were there with a stick. You were there."

" Ah, God," he cried in a sharp agony, " why did he come there ? Why did you let him ? "

She beat on the air. " Don't argue like that. Don't stand and bring out these cold arguments one after another. I shall burst. Don't you know you tried to . . . Oh, I shall go mad, I shall go mad."

" It's dreadful," he said. " but for God's sake let's try and see some light. I was only trying to . . ."

" Stop it," said the Colonel like gunshot ; and they were all forward—some at his side, some at hers ; and he saw her fling out her arms against them and stamp her foot.

" You tried to *murder* him," she cried. " To murder him, to murder him."

" No . . ."

" To murder him. You mix with murderers. You're a murderer yourself. Leave me alone. I told you I should ;

I told you all, I . . . Oh ! He always hated me. He always hated Maurice. They tried to murder my baby ; he envies everybody what they've got, and he hasn't the power to get for himself. He's *mean* . . . Mean. He couldn't even be an Officer in the War. He . . . Murderer. Oh, take him away, take him away. Oh, take him . . ." She choked, flung her hands round her face. They were pressing forward—all barriers down—had her, guided her, were leaning over her chair ; from among their anxious bodies came the rush of sobs —broken and strangled—bursting out again louder and louder.

Alone by the table, stiff with horror—" What shall I do ? " he said. " What shall I do ? What *can* I do ? "

" I fancy," said Mr Margarietson from his chair, " you might as well leave us, Hugh."

" Leave ? Go away ? "

" I . . . should say so, Hugh. Yes."

He turned to answer and couldn't ; a spasm of fury bit him suddenly ; he fixed his brows into an eternal loathing and glared. Mr Margarietson shifted his eyes placidly towards the throng—the soothing voices and the sobs.

Hugh reached the door ; his mother saw him, wavered, came half a yard. " Mother . . ."

" Oh, my dear, I can't. I can't."

" I've got to go. It's hopeless. Mother."

" I can't."

" I want to see Father. I *must* see him." He seized her hand.

" Not now, not now. How can I ? Be sensible. To-morrow, dear, to-morrow, perhaps."

" Now."

The sobs, dulled for a moment, rose again. His mother took her hand away. " No, I can't. I can't. I must get Irene out ; I must see to Maurice . . ."

" I don't care," he said savagely. " I must, I tell you." He stopped her again. " Where's his room . . his bedroom ? "

The sobs beat fiercely. " Mrs *Brabant*," cried the Colonel and Miss Dallas, " Lucia, here."

" Where's his room ? "

She told him in a gasp and he was gone. He closed the door silently behind him, and stood in the empty corridor with all the sounds half-stifled ; and like water the agony seemed to trickle slowly down his body and form a puddle at his feet.

He moved away, looking at the numbers on the doors. All that had just passed was nothing ; he felt of it as a necessary gulf in time ; everything was to come. His mind was again at that moment where his father had left him. It was finality he wanted now—to come close to his father, to lock doors about them, to compel him into speech and action. To know the worst of thought. To beat out between them on the ghastly anvil of their speech—blow after blow—their knowledge of each other. To tear the brain from the skull, whatever it should mean—whatever it should mean.

He found it. The door was half ajar, the light was on. He knocked and entered. There was no one in the room.

Had the old man left it for a moment ? He hung there brooding at the vague disorder of chairs, the slightly creased bed-cover. No footsteps came. In the silence he felt on skin and nostrils the sober delicacy of his parents' room ; he breathed in curiously, walked round to the dressing-table, looked at himself in the glass. This was Hugh Brabant. Hugh Brabant—rather pale but expressionless ; surprisingly so. Hair stiff as usual and in fair arrangement ; he ran fingers through it once. This concrete apparition of an ordinary young man suddenly cooled him ; he buttoned his coat ; he took the business of life in both hands and smiled at himself without vanity. There was, in the side of the mirror, a folded sheet of paper.

He saw his eyebrows go up. He bent. His mother's name was scribbled on it. He knew what it was before he opened it. He only had a strange sense of the childishness of the old man. He read :

" My Dear Lucia,—I am going to drop down to Surrey to-night. I feel very unwell and, since you are all busy just now, an extra collapse would be too damned silly for words. As a matter of fact, I have a notion the quiet will set me up again in half an hour. I'm 'phoning to the servants. Don't worry. If I could help, I'd stay ; but you have Mildred. See you to-morrow. Yours—Arthur.

" I'll spend to-morrow morning getting everything comfortable for you."

His temples were beating with the secrecy. He slipped back the note into the mirror, and hurried out and down the lift. It was almost eleven.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

He didn't necessarily have to think of Eve ; she was resolving her own problems somewhere or other ; and to remember that, made shyly ache, for a moment, all that he esteemed in himself. A thin curiosity vaporized across his mind, and he drew his breath. It was very sad. He put it away, and felt his limbs free on pavements under the sky. He hadn't to think of her ; but he was always a sensitive man over the small courtesies and compacts—and he supposed he had better go home first ; and perhaps a bag should be taken with razor and hair-brush, and so on. He called a taxi.

His flat, when he reached it, was pitch-dark. He'd imagined it might be ; and drowned back in the taxi, he had worked coldly through every chance aspect in the situation. He opened the door of his drawing-room to write her a note. He stopped. The blankness with releasing springs of a chair—windows just luminous—gave her suddenly up ; she had leapt out and stood.

" By God ! " he said rigidly, " you startled me."

" I was asleep."

" Yes," he said, " yes." He felt and put down his hat. " Dear, since you're here, listen. I can't spend very much time. A hundred things have happened to-night ; I feel it critical." His lips were letting facts through like a trap, while half his mind blamed her for sitting like this in the dark ; she'd done it before—and it meant agonies ; and when he lit the gas, saying " D'you mind ? " he noticed that she was in her heavy coat and her hat tossed aside on the writing-table. She had been out. He went on to describe it all economically, leaning against the mantel-piece and looking down.

She listened, throwing herself far back into the chair and clasping fingers behind her head. Now and then he heard her hair rub faintly. " Why do you want to go down there to-night, Hugh ? "

" What ? "

" Why are you going down there ? "

" I . . . want to see him. It needn't disturb you."

" Why ? You're not worried at doing it — hitting Maurice ? "

"Worried?" said he. "I hadn't thought about it. . . . What? Worried? No, I don't imagine so. I'm gratified—since after all there's no real damage. I'm pleased about it; one had to precipitate crisis somehow, and it was as much his fault as mine. But I'm tired out."

"Then why go?"

"It's my affair. You said yourself, my dear. . . . I'm driving forward to my own solution. Yes."

"Love, don't leave me. What? Don't leave me. I'm afraid p'raps; or I'm pleased p'raps. I don't know what I feel. Don't go; you've seen enough of them to-night. Hugh—Hugh, think of me as only a woman after all. I must beg you to; I'm sorry."

He had to look at her; he became conscious of her voice—a warm rustle and sleepy; he said, "How charming you look to-night. But afraid? or pleased?—or whatever it is, I *can't* do anything. It isn't a fair demand you're making. I can't. My dear, you destroy your own solution of life; you tear it up by this. Do realize that you destroy it; it would be so easy for me to give way."

"M'm."

"Have we got a time-table?" He eyed her again, biting his thumb and frowning. "My dear, there's nothing to be afraid of. You realize that?"

"Yes," she said.

"You can't have it both ways."

"No."

He was pushing past her to the table, and she'd caught his sleeve and pulled herself up. Tide rose in him. That incomprehensible web of arms clothed him and he saw that his breath blew and stirred with solemn intimacy the pine-dark leaves and needles of her hair. She flung her face against him; for a silence she offered him her hair—all its smells and womanish care and depth—to kiss it or hurt it or do as he wished. He couldn't. He felt as though he were a child suddenly woken up from a cradle, and he was frightened and madly allured.

"Let me come with you," she said.

"No."

She dropped her head right back. "Why not? What have I done? D'you think I'm looking out to catch you—drag you into some kind of snare? I'm not, I'm not; you're

so suspicious of me ; oh, Hugh . . . I only want to be with you. I won't say a word ; just a dumb creature waiting for you. I'll wait." She pressed her forehead against his shoulder, kneading it to and fro. " I'll sit dumb outside in the bushes and wait for you. Why do you suspect me ? See, you can go in and say what you like to him . . . as long as you like. All day if you want to. Let me come."

His mouth was dry and coarse ; he said at last, " You know I love you."

" Then you must show it. Then I must come."

He hesitated. " You promise you won't . . ."

" What ? "

" . . . Won't interfere. Do you mean you'll stay outside ? "

" Now, am I a liar ? Am I ? What made you so suspicious ? I want to shake you ; I will shake you ; you'd say I've caused everything—that I've driven you on by trapping you. Indeed, you have said as much. Almost as much. What do *I* care about your father or what you say to him ? Hugh . . . you weren't afraid to try and kill that Maurice, and now you imagine frantically that I. . . . Mean, mean."

" Very well," he said, " Come. Come, then ; " and he took her head and drowned his mouth and nostrils in hair, drinking it, remembering the same hair so many weeks ago, so many months ago, or a year and more. Drowning brought memory ; he knew that lonely sea. He felt it draw sharp and scented along his teeth. " We must go. Have we a time-table ? "

There was no time-table in their flat, that had so weak a root—a root that was after all spectral from cut flowers and branches, in life and its manifold coincidences. He'd known there was none. He looked into a drawer and went to the telephone, saying sleepily, " D'you like this place any more than you did—three months ago. Less than three months ago."

She said, " It's a poor thing. Don't laugh at it. It's only our mixed shadow when we were much younger."

" Younger ? " he said, waiting at the receiver.

" Oh, don't ask. What do I mean ? I think I've stopped having any age. A woman has no age ; life just happens to her—some inside and some outside ; that's all. It's the simplest way."

He heard no more than fragments of what she said. There was a train they might catch near midnight. With one bag —the flat turned to darkness just as it stood and unaccommodated, a note pinned to the door for Mrs Lamb—they were quietly on the stairs and then in the street.

The night was still calm and remote from all climate ; it had only turned a little colder. There were no stars ; there would be no rain. The terminus was like a mouth ; its roof tasted, in growing silence, smoke-fumes and dust. It was a draught at last—mucous snoring infinitely prolonged and fatigued. Its reality hurt him, as though he might wake up and be lost.

The railway-carriage was stale with a certain hot rustiness. Light gleamed there, an eye foolish and unwinking. This cradle rocked ; and committed to it, when it tugged away and air came flowing in, he felt his respiration hum—felt his thoughts hum drowsily. They were alone. She never spoke ; her lids were wide open at the window next her, then towards the far one, then back again.

Her head turned ; placidly her vision travelled—out of one darkness, into another. So moves a creature, but it was nothing to him ; his whole organic tilt, heavy and impending as it was, hung right away from her ; it massed slowly between his eyes—upon his conscious jaw, while he gathered poise to meet his father. It was his turn now to feel that troubled surprise at her presence—why had she ever come ? and at moments a resentment with her. What had she said ? What was the phrase about setting traps for him ? And one remembered how it had been within the shadow—under the consenting glance, as it were—of this creature, that so much had happened. What was the phrase ? Trapped him ? But all this slid off his mind, finding no concentration there ; and she slid off his mind, as he impended once again with heavy eyebrows above his father.

Whatever she had or had not done, it was now he that was setting hands upon the web of his family—adhesive web, tenuous and palpitating, mystery of mysteries ; he must comprehend every filament of it, where pours its love into us—where pours its hatred into us ; love and hatred and pity and blood-guiltiness—the substance of his own soul, the substance of his father's soul—one substance strangely intermingling, all waiting to be teased out between them thread by

thread. No chance of evasion now ; a single night's evasion, and the whole family would be round them like falling leaves, obscuring the naked web ; now he must face the old man, or never find the resolution he had gone out to discover.

So he looked again at Eve ; and wondered why she had come—and wondered, for a moment or two, why he had no sensation when he looked at her, neither interest nor discomposure ; it was as if he glanced at his shadow. He relit the pipe he had been smoking.

Their station came. They were driven out into a new air, dank evergreens and silence ; here it was colder ; they shivered, holding out tickets in a world where to be still awake was guilty. Hands and voices here had yawned into mechanisms ; footsteps were furtive. Computable footsteps drew away from them flatly down this or that avenue of the town ; and they themselves travelled out beyond, into space —into the blind bubble. Everywhere darkness—one felt the trees, one trudged inelegantly, shuffling the hard surface and rolling a trifle with fatigue. He walked quickly. She—who was there entirely by her own wish, not his—trotted almost after him, sometimes a pace or more behind ; she said nothing, even when he commented in low voice on the road, on the night ; she panted, and he could hear her regular deep pants and see her breath. He said at last : " Would you like to take my arm ? Would it help you ? " and she did so without speaking ; and he seemed to carry her along in the force of his decision. She was a burden to him, just as he carried the bag—not thinking about it.

His father's gates were open and he stopped. He meditated by what mode of transition his father might have come—by car or by rail—and he gazed into the chill vacuum of trees against the sky. There was no sound significant. She had said nothing, but he replied softly : " Yes. I know they have retired by now. I know they may all be in bed. Are you cold ? M'm ? "

" No. . . ." He felt her shake her head. When it came to it, even without her he would have formulated no plan. What plan could one have formulated ? He took her arm in turn and guided her through laurels shoulder first, till he felt the pavement before the potting-sheds and smelt them mouldily there—and so through a gate round by the grassy yard-edge to the stables ; and there he hung, taking breath.

" I think," he said at her ear, " this is best. . . . Yes. That is, if the key's where it usually is." He groped for a hole behind beams and found it, found the key, fingered it into lock.

They went in and behind them he re-locked. She snatched his arm again because, as they stood, there was a sudden pregnancy in the oven-thick darkness—a tickle of straw and rasp of wire-netting and the hairy odour saturating. She moaned faintly.

" I don't know," he said thickly. " What ? Rats perhaps. No, no. One of his cages, of course. Let's see." He groped and struck a match ; darkness spun cobwebs all round ; the light ran up the ladder, ran over wire and inquisitive stretched shapes ; and he bent nearer. He dropped the match, trod it, lit another and peered. " Yes. I remember. His . . . kinkajous." Their eyes were quick topazes ; they fell off and scuttled. " Yes, *you* remember, too. Strange, isn't it ? Like strange fragments of his own mind hopping up out of the darkness. Poor old solitary ! "

The match burnt out. They waited. " No question, I'm afraid," said he, " that the old man is asleep now. But I'll see. I want to see ; and you . . . in the loft, would you be all right a while ? There's often straw up there ; there should be straw for the animals. I wish we had a candle."

" There is," she said, " in the bag."

" You put one in ? "

" Two." She stretched out her hands for the bag and gave him a candle. He struck his match and they paused, listening ; flame dipped and strengthened ; far outside, beyond walls and evergreens, ran the clear crush of tyres upon gravel ; and it slowed, and the motor throbbed like a bees'-nest ; and he said : " H'm. Then there's no hurry. He's come by car, but he's been long about it. There's no hurry ; he'll have something to eat . . . and they can't see the stables from the house." He breathed very heavily, and became bovine and staring ; he breathed like a sea and closed his eyelids and shrugged himself. " Come along." She followed him as a shadow ; he was surprised to find her standing there by the piles of straw.

" Dear," he said, " if you lie here and have a candle, nothing can hurt you. Let me make you a bed." He dragged straw and stretched himself again. " Do you smell the apples in

the loft next door ? They clean this place well—that's one blessing ; there's scarcely a spider's web, and I think there will be no rats."

" I'm not afraid of any rats, Hugh."

" No ? Let me find you a stick."

" No . . . I don't want any stick. Thank you for my bed. I'll lie down here."

" Yes," he said, " and take off your coat, sweetheart, and spread it over you ; it'll be warmer. Your hat can go here. Let me make you a hay-pillow ; " and he folded his scarf over it and, when he had caressed her to the strewn bed, he took off his own coat for her. " I hope it's not too uncomfortable, too strange."

" Oh, God ! " she said sleepily, " I had beds on straw sometimes before you were . . . before you were born almost. With smell of apples." She laughed, and drew the coats about her.

" The candle's quite safe," he said : and stood wondering. " I haven't heard the car go. No. Are you asleep ? I can't think why you came . . . why you wanted to come. Does it seem unreal to you ? The car . . . the driver is, of course, having a snack. I rather wish we had some food."

She stirred. " The bag."

" What ? "

" In the bag. And there's apples." He opened the bag and found cake in a paper parcel, and said : " Ah, my dear, you're cleverer than I am. After all. Will you have some ? " He repeated it, and she was asleep. He crept to the ladder, and, sitting hunched with his feet upon it, took his slice of cake. Draughts sluiced over him. His stomach was a gnaw like a yearning animal, not with hunger ; this hollow place was a cold bath that had no water, and he felt hope for rebirth out of it ; but hope lay ever stifled. The woman breathed behind him ; he would not think of her ; she did not belong to this. Kind and hot broodings came, and he kept putting them aside, because she didn't belong to this ; but looking forward he saw his father's surprise—incomprehension ; doors to be closed and maybe a hand banged suddenly on table and violence of " You *must* hear me. . . . Now. Yes, *now*." He thought over this, licking the last cake-crumbs from his fingers—with his soul transmuted into rusty nails, wall whitewashed and a hanging twist of rope. The car

out there—now utterly silent—he couldn't wait longer for it. He rose, stretched, and tiptoed into his own shadow down the rungs. Wire-netting moved.

It was much colder in the air. He realized it; he had no coat. By the same way he loitered back to the drive and crossed it, and by laurels to the lawn's edge; and when he was alone, for the first time he doubted not his will but its effectiveness—its effectiveness. Was there solution? Not rather a thousand such scenes as he felt waiting for him, into the far-off channels of life repeated again and again? This is a family. He stiffened his lips; he marched towards the house.

In the hall was a dim light; in one room a light behind curtains—his parents' bedroom. He bent frowning over the small two-seater car, and the world began to lose its bottom; since this would never have been the car in which his father came from London. This was a private car, light and unclosed. He frowned at the hall-door half ajar; there was no sound. He creased his face with impatience. He thrust his hands for warmth into his pockets and loitered round the car, loitered brooding back to the lawn.

In questionable shape, that car; he had no mood for questions. He had no place for them here. Given this interval, doubts could swarm again; and the more he struggled, the more they came. It had to be done, of course, this secluded meeting with his father; but what was the use? Will a family ever help with cold deliberation one of its members to strike up its balance—to rule harsh line beneath it and say "Solved"? Is that its nature? Is that its fate? Surely always—and uncontrollably—to circle him with another formula and another, and another, till he sickens with it. But to-night it must be done, it must be done. He went shivering round the alligator-pool and looked into its senseless solitude out there; he walked among the chestnut trunks; and, hearing the door close and the car started up, he jumped forward without thinking. He ran to the path's end and the drive. The lights caught him; the car stopped with a jerk and an exclamation.

"Hullo! I know you, don't I? Brabant's son?"—and he knew *him*.

"Hullo, Doctor, m'm . . .?"

"Yes, that's quite right. I . . . didn't gather you were down here."

" I've only just arrived."

" Ah. You've only just arrived ? H'm," said the local man carelessly. " Yes, well . . . shall I ring them again for you ? Would you like me to come back ? "

" Yes," he said. " No," he said. " No. No, don't. I haven't understood ; I didn't expect you. Is anything wrong ? "

The doctor's head came round ; he paused. " Yes," he said shortly. " Your father. . . . He collapsed an hour ago. The servants rang for me."

" Collapsed ? What ? What is it then ? Anything bad ? "

" Well." He laid gloved hand along the car's side. " Oh, no, I wouldn't say *bad*. Sort of slight hemiplegia . . . Overwork, I suppose, worry or something. H'h, *I* shouldn't be agitated if I were you. I'm going to tool round again in the morning. We'll pull him through. Getting cold, isn't it ? What's the matter ? "

" The cold. I left my greatcoat behind."

" Left your greatcoat ? You one of these fresh-air fellows ? "

" No, no. Look here . . ."

" Good God ! left your greatcoat ? Where did you leave it ? You'd better tool in and have a stiff whisky."

" Oh, damn my coat. And damn your callousness. You devils get so used to it, you strain off all your human feelings. I want to know what this is. What's this hemiplegia ? Isn't it a sort of . . . stroke ? "

" Well . . ."

" Oh, don't let's have any medical caution. It seems a kind of pride with your crowd to give nothing away. What is it ? Or if you don't know for certain, what do you imagine it is ? What form does it take ? "

" Well, what you'll actually find, Brabant, is a definite paralysis of his right arm, partially affecting the . . . er . . . muscles of the neck, you know, and the face." He played with his steering-wheel. " That's just precisely what it is. Satisfied ? "

" God Almighty ! " he said, shivering violently.

" Pah, don't get agitated. Go in and have that whisky."

" But he'll recover ? "

" I don't know."

" How will his age influence it ? "

" I can't say yet. Look here, I must buzz off. I'll see you

again to-morrow. Believe me, I'll get on to a specialist right away, if there's any need. So long. Good night." He started up his car again.

" Good night."

Tide passed out through the gates, shrank easily away; silently settled like blown dust. " And these things," he said, conversing on with himself, " happen at times. *I* have done this; or at least I am the vehicle of it; or at least they'll all say I did it. Hemiplegia. . . ." He remembered in a sharp vision the way that hand had been wrenched madly out of his when he would have taken it. There was nothing one could say. He felt no sorrow and never surprised himself that he felt none. Only, there could be no solution; there was nothing one could say now; and he even laughed—" Rest . . . he's got rest now, indeed. Perhaps," he commented to himself bitterly, " that was why he dropped so suddenly out of action. He won't have to take my hand. These things happen; it gives him a chance . . . and, Lord! It doesn't help *me*. It leaves *me*." He hung for a moment over the house. He went back to the stables.

As he pushed through the evergreens, he was thinking; he was discovering how his fingers ran out into gesticulation. He stopped—frowned. How easy to fall into the dramatic with such a theme as this, and his audience right at hand. " I have done this. . . . Look what I've done; how I suffer." One could laugh now, but to be simple—to be as simple as he felt—that was the strangely hard thing. Are we ever human? Hurriedly he edged round the yard and let himself in.

He stumbled on the ladder-rungs, hoping even as he stumbled she would wake. He found her, drawn full-lipped, and heavy from her sheath of sleep—propped on one hand among the straw and accepting him with large eyes. " Hugh," she said, " have you seen him? "

" No."

" You haven't? " She moved; she turned back the coats from her throat and shoulders. " Something's happened to him."

" Yes. Yes, it has. He's had a kind of . . . nervous stroke." He felt himself hiccup and his face went cold. " I don't want to be tragic about it; I want to tell you quietly. I heard the details from his doctor; I met him. . . ." He

paused a moment. " Met him leaving the place in his car ; it was *his* car," and then he talked on soberly, with hands in his trousers pockets, taking a few paces this way or that way. Whenever he glanced towards her, half his mind in speaking brooded over her immobility and the full sea-rising, sea-falling of her body. He finished.

" Hugh, how d'you mean that it's your doing ? Why is it your doing ? "

" Dear, in the manner of speech—that my very presence and all I've done to-night must have . . . induced it, allowed for that nervous earthquake in him . . . hastened it any way. Hastened it, you know. Let's face facts. Oh, I will evade the dramatic poses—the obvious sensations ; I will admit to you that what I feel is no kind of sorrow or agony, or any vestige of remorse. I only feel a strange stiffened elation, an awful and cold elation. I like to think what hand I had in it. See, I'm not trying to disguise anything."

She'd taken her eyes off him ; she dropped back her whole pose into a grave laziness, and pouted slowly, looking at the straw, and said : " I think you're just disguising your feelings in another way. *I* don't believe one kills one's father in this sort of manner ; and you don't believe so either."

He felt the chill rise with deliberation up his legs—inch after inch. " Kill him ? What do you mean ? and suppose I have killed him. Suppose he dies to-night."

" Well ? " she said heavily.

He put a hand against his brow. He thought : he groaned. " I know. I know. Dies. . . . Suppose he dies. Let me see it, like a picture. Yes, yes, it is a thing to meditate on. Even if he lives, how he'll loathe me ; and how the blame will go round, whispered from one point to another, branching out." He took a stride. " Branching out." He stopped and stared at her with tight lips. " Dra-ma, dra-ma. What's the use ? I don't feel like that at all. I don't, you know. It was a relief but it means nothing. All I feel is a pleasure, a strange natural pleasure. It creeps through my intestines, and my blood flows and I'm strong ; I've smashed Maurice on the head and I've mauled my father's mind till he can't stand. I've. . . . What ? "

He could scarcely hear her. " This business we came down for to-night—*you* came down for. To try and find some . . . solution. To reach some beginning of a finality."

"Ah, that," he said, dropping his head. "That—yes. Yes, indeed. I've had that sense already; I've had that revelation. Ah, my God! you're right; this has cut full across my life—and where do I find myself after all? How does it help me? Here's this problem of my family to be cleared up—this problem of my family and all its affinities; one must determine an equation with one's family; every man has to—hasn't he?—and all I seem able to effect are monstrous blows, fierce murderous blows and a kind of desperate exultation. Mere blows—they might at least have smashed open a chance of coming to decisions; they might have done so, if I'd had the luck. Why should the old man collapse like this . . .? One asks for no more than common luck. Here was the chance, and then . . . frustration, complete and final frustration." He thought a while and laughed. "Strange ideas flow into one's brain. I feel for the moment that he will die—or loiter towards death; and I feel that I, too, ought by logic to quit the world and drive it to a crisis with his ghost. How can I live on? What justification have I for living on? He has never understood me; and I think that, whenever I have the chance of being understood by some creature, fate will snatch away my chance. I shall resolve nothing, no simple human relationship. I'm of no value to myself, no value to you."

He fell into silence. The conflict of his life took on separate entity—a gross weight, a cage of interlocking beasts—such as one should almost be able to lift, to heave off like a vomit; but he had no strength to lift it. He lay soured under it, no longer pitied himself, merely stood in frustrated silence. He turned a little. Thought tried to fill the dull vacuum of the loft. Their solitude and his long shadow invited him; they stirred in him and he was noting how the woman sat there propped and with straw-flecks carelessly in her hair—brooding down—and bare forearm smooth and sleek in the shadow of her. He began now to wonder about *her* thoughts. He moved again.

"Hugh."

"Yes, sweetheart."

"That's a comfortable word," she said lazily, not shifting. "You haven't often called me that. Why do you now? Hugh, listen; for what did you come down here to-night after all? I think it would have been impossible."

" Impossible ? " said he.

" Wouldn't it ? I think so. I never supposed it wouldn't be—but one's brain always hopes ; one's brain makes itself ridiculous by hoping against all sense. *I* know that these interviews solve nothing ; each interview merely gathers material for a fresh one ; they can pile up to eternity—can't they ? "

He said with dry palate : " I'll confess ; even before we arrived here—even before I saw that doctor—I had a few doubts."

" Doubts ? " said she.

He turned away. " Certainties, if you wish it. Certainties. . . ."

" And why do you want your father . . . why do you want every one to understand you ? "

" Why, that," he said, " is natural, isn't it ? How is life otherwise possible ? Understand ? But that is the only resolution of all these pains ; what are we dealing with but misjudgments and fears and incompatibilities ? I must be understood by those I live among ; and you, darling—you urged me towards it ; you urged me to have it out with them."

" Maybe, but I was wrong ; and we both felt I was wrong. But then one takes any excuse . . . m'm ? "

" For what ? " he said.

She was not listening. " Argument," she said, " is bottomless ; it's our minds that argue, and how bottomless they seem ; they go down into depths for ever and ever—and always of the same material ; it never helps to argue and discuss and talk. None of them thank you for it ; none of them understand you a fraction better for it. So you see. . .," she suddenly turned her face and looked at him with large drowsy eyes, tossed back the hair from her forehead. He breathed deeply. " Oh, you're cold, dearest man ; you must be very cold. Come here ; come in among the straw ; it wraps one round—it's the bed you laid for me."

He came silently across and threw his hat down and sat upon the straw-pile just above her. He drew it about him. With chin on fist he stared at her bent neck and the candle-light, that worked along so many distinguishable strands of hair—deep, soft hair, a forest of it.

" Hugh, what is it you want after all ? "

He gazed down at her ; he became a lax and gentle tremor. " I want simplicity ; I want an end to these bruisings and complications. I find myself alone. Some twist of my soul forces me into conflict with every one whose love I seem to desire ; my very nature leads me on into isolated and revolutionary ways of thought—tempts me on against my will. I might screw myself to a pitch of blazing assertiveness and sustain myself there—but to what end ? I remain only the more isolated ; and I dread this isolation. My thoughts, my bowels, my very genitals seem to twine themselves around the men and women that I know."

She suddenly out of the sluggish inane flung her arms about his waist and cried, drowning her head in his lap. " You know you can ; you know you can. . . . I'm not asking. You must ask first. What else did you hit him for ? What else is your father paralytic for ? I can't see what else. They've all vanished, haven't they ? You've got rid of them all, haven't you ? I don't see."

His whole body woke towards her ; his nostrils sang. They stayed so, dumb and quivering.

" Hugh."

" Yes. Yes, sweetheart."

" You told me all you did to-night ; you haven't asked one word about me."

" No," he said.

" Do you know where I went ? "

" No."

" I went into Chelsea—can you hear me ?—to the studio of that man Crowborough, that creature with the long nose. I went there—because I invited myself the night before—last night, when you were out at the police-station. It seems years away—and yet it doesn't ; when I feel it, it doesn't." She paused. " You love me, Hugh. Oh, you needn't speak ; I shouldn't believe you, if you said no—should I ? This isn't a confession ; it's just a statement of fact ; I'm telling it because I want to. There was only him there, when I got there ; and he'd promised to have some other men, some others I told him of. He said he couldn't get them, but he's a liar anyway ; and I know that, because when we'd had some coffee and talked, he asked if he could kiss me. I said I didn't think so ; and he said he was parched with longing for a kiss —parched like a flower, and might he not—mightn't he ?

And he took me by my shoulders, and began to argue that, nowadays after all, sleeping together, indeed, was no more than a kiss or touching the hand, what with contraceptives making the sexes equal and all that; and I could give him so much—in so little, so much out of all my store of passion. He said how he yearned; so I said no, I was going off; he might be right, but that had nothing to do with it; and he was a liar when he said he couldn't get anyone else." She paused again. "Well, then, he became irritable and was rude to me and started sneering at . . . revolutionary ideals or something; so I just smacked his face. I smacked it as hard as I could. Then I came home and went to sleep, till you opened the drawing-room door. That's all."

He gave a hoarse involuntary sound; he touched her hair. She threw back her face panting. "Hugh, what are we two doing on the surface of life like this? Why do we go wandering into Chelsea studios and down back-streets? Isolated? Of course, you're isolated. One's never anything else, until one dares to mix with all that flows on and on . . . out of one's grasp, away into chance and infinite possibility. I want to; I want to mix and roll on into whatever comes. I'm an animal, and I want. . . . Say something, Hugh. Do you know why I went along to Chelsea?"

"To . . . meet some other men."

"Do you know why?"

He drew a long breath. "Yes," he whispered; and suddenly cried out: "Why couldn't you wait? Not a day—a few days. I was struggling; I was groping after my own solution. I'd almost found it; to-night I might have found it and shaken together all my doubts and weaknesses into some structure more or less complete—more or less perfect. Couldn't you wait?"

"No, I couldn't; because there is no solution that way, and you've confessed that there isn't. What is all this agony about your father and your family and the rest of them? It grows laughable. Good God! are *you* the child? I want to have a baby because I want to *have* a baby—to feel myself having it and be part of change; I'm quite selfish about it, and the baby can turn out as it likes; I want it. You've lost enough energy to-night on other people; you've just wasted it. All that's left belongs to me. Let's plunge into life now—and create something at last. Come

to me, my dear heart. . . ." She choked, dropping her face.

He crouched forward over her. His body was resigned; he felt his thoughts shudder on the hot steep current of his fate—his resignation. "What? What? Now, when the old man . . . ? When he may be dying or dead?"

"Now, of course, now," she cried fiercely. "Why else did you drive him paralytic, except to free yourself for this? I can't see what else. Where's all that exultation? What's a more natural moment?—Ah, come, come; *I* know I have no need to speak."

He girdled her with his arms; they strained together, half-seated on the straw—panting from stomach to throat with sobs they had never before known. He felt for her lips and kissed them, till their mouths lay opened and scorched. What was this apparition of the still unborn? What was this ghost of futurity and sacred tides—of change eternal—begotten out of destruction and blood? What was this life dropped upon a corpse, life the house-fellow of death? He did not care. Nothing was solved and all things were solved, since nothing could be the same again. To-morrow he must be a new creature, a begetter of change eternal. She fell back upon her pillow waiting with lips still apart.

He leaned his hand across towards the candle, where it stood solemn and erect; he would have no candle. It should be in darkness. "In two minutes," he breathed to her. "In two minutes."

## CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

He awoke. A thin visibility had possessed the loft; its filaments, creeping on through windows dull with straw-dust and through all the unrealized cracks, were drawing from the plasm of darkness a beam, wall-nails, a wisp or so. He loosened his arm gently from her shoulders and, throwing the coats off him, stood up—arranged his clothes. Sluices of cold air ran like water. He took bath in it afresh; every muscle tightened and he stretched up his arms into a strong balance; and with it the world took about him fresh meanings. He peered down at the woman who might even now be a

mother ; or if not now, he felt, then next week maybe, next month ; at least already in his will she was not Eve only, but Eve with child.

He tingled, walked softly to the window, whence every tree and building should be reborn ; still faint and stiff, they absorbed him. He thought beyond them and his mind dropped at last upon the old man in his bedroom, so very close to him. Was he sleeping ? Was he awake ? Might he be even dead ? He mused. New life had swallowed death and decay, and held it bracketed for always in a strange sack of mere negation. He looked out on the buildings and sighed ; emotion passed thinly up the sigh as up its appropriate path. This was one's offering to all debility.

His mind turned steeply and solemnly towards last night and its consummation. He mused upon the act—that it was a challenge and a sacrifice, as awful as the blow he had given ; and then he mused—that it was not a challenge or a sacrifice but a self-isolation. He had dared to be alone, like a monolith ; and if she wished merely that her organism should become a tide, what should his own become ? What had he desired for it ? What—but that it should be simplicity, a monolith, flowing with waters and eternally yielded up to the future ? This at least he had found. The very accomplishment of this transmuted all that had gone before it ; the paralysis of an old man was no more than occasion or fortuity —no more now than that. He had to wonder—not whether the old man was dead, but whether a child was living ; however much he struggled, his thoughts went that way, not the other. He wondered at his thoughts. Life would never be the same again ; since that is the mode of life—not through conversions or redemptions but by these momentary acts, after which life will never be the same. A new cycle opens and all instincts reshape themselves. Life is still there, hot with problems—never the same drama.

He turned back to their straw-bed, and again leaned over her ; and she, conscious of him and of loneliness and cold, opened her eyes and thrust out her arms bare. He sat on the pillow and drew her back against his knees, caressing the coats about her. The warmth he felt from her hurt his palate and throat, and curiously bred a deeper and deeper tenderness. He combed her hair with his fingers. He said, " One must begin to think of trains. They will be down here early in the

morning . . . or even by car. One needn't meet them. I'm right, sweetheart ? "

" Yes."

" I could 'phone to the office to-day that I'm not coming. Any excuse would do ; touch of flu . . . or the old man for the matter of that. They're bound to hear something later, some vague account of illness."

She lay back against his body quietly. " Will he die, I wonder. D'you think so ? "

" I don't suppose he will. Why should he ? He has comfort, every care, the best doctors. Think of it coldly with the light coming in. Last night was a mood. Our moods to-day are over-dramatized ; they turn everything about them into crisis." He mused a while. " He may die—or be dead now. Well . . . suppose he is dead ; what of it ? I feel that it takes place beyond the utmost radius of my organs. But I don't imagine he'll die ; one doesn't die."

She was silent ; then she said, " I may be pregnant now."

" Yes," said he.

" Though, indeed, I feel that I've been spiritually pregnant for weeks."

" That's true enough," said he.

They waited there ; time spun its rich authentic thread, neither hurrying nor delaying. The light grew about them. She asked him suddenly, " What do you think of the Masses now ? What do you think of Revolution ? "—and he answered, " Yes, they were flowing back into *my* consciousness. That is strange too ; for the moment they are intellectualized—and I say with a certain coldness that I suppose it will come, I suppose the Revolution will come." He lowered his eyelids. " So one assumes ; so in theory one observes the unfolding of life ; and I suppose that I shall be there—and am even now there, since where else is it possible for me to be ? I feel it a humorous image—melancholy image ; I incline to shrug over it. What will come out of all this ? Whatever comes, I shall have to participate in it, eat it and drink it, and nourish myself on it and grant it recognition. That is so. If I find myself next week mingled in some revolutionary pie, it will not give me any surprise ; I shall only smile sadly—it is the world to-day. Apparently it's also my temperament ; one has to be respectful towards one's own temperament."

They had drawn together and yet apart. She understood

what he said ; she admitted it, but little more ; his feelings were his own concern. She picked out pieces of straw and split them carefully between her fingers.

She believed in the world's change, because she had grown one with the automatism of change. He saw this dimly in her ; and he, too, believed in change, because he had committed himself wilfully to change—and so henceforth he must cling to change as a sacred thing ; passionately he must allow for change and glorify it and defend it against all his own doubts and vacillations. Self-condemned, he was a partisan of change and futurity. What is unborn must still be born—let it be born, suppress under the mind's dark soil every criticism of its birth. So he felt. He did not understand that this was what he felt. He stirred and half-rose. " They'll be waking soon," he said. " Indeed, there must have been someone awake all night ; and I don't know what time the gardeners arrive."

He helped her up and brushed away the straw from her clothes. " Since there is no need," he said, " to have a collision with the family at this moment, one might walk on —on to the next station. It should be easy to find a breakfast somewhere."

" Easy enough," she answered, combing out her hair.

He bent and searched the straw to leave nothing of their presence behind them. Then he kissed her and they went creaking down the ladder ; the caged creatures seemed to be asleep.

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
THE EDINBURGH PRESS, 9 AND 11 YOUNG STREET, EDINBURGH

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